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ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE



FINNEGAN'S LEAP

Murder on a Summer Day

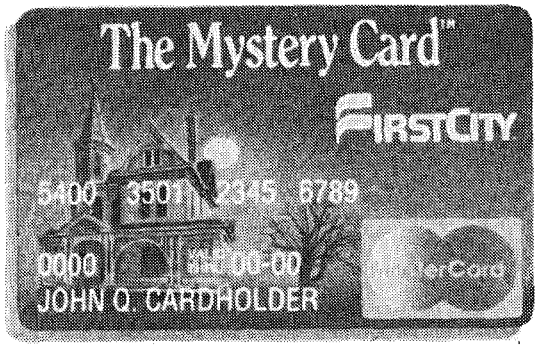
by Sherrard Gray

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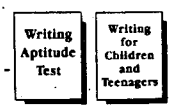
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Alvin Tresselt was Editor of Parents' Magazine Press, *Humpty Dumpty's Magazine*, and a board member of the Author's Guild. His 53 books for young readers have sold over two million copies.

**Testimonials were provided voluntarily, without remuneration by Institute students, 1985–1989.*

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EDITOR'S NOTES

by Cathleen Jordan

If you were with us in 1985 and late 1984, you will remember stories by Sherrard Gray and Curt Fischer, both of whom are back in this issue with new tales. Gray's "Finnegan's Leap," our cover story, and Fischer's "Wilderness Pilot" bring the wild outdoors and a summer atmosphere into our pages, especially appropriate, perhaps, to that vacation-time reading Mary Cannon writes about in "Booked & Printed" this time.

Thomas Adcock *is* new to us, but he is a well-established writer of fiction and nonfiction, with about twenty stories previously published in *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* and an Edgar nomination for one of them. His first novel, *Sea of Green,* was published last November by the Mysterious Press. "Straight Down the Middle" undoubtedly draws on his expertise as a former police reporter.

With "The Cache," his first story, we introduce Albert Bashover. Now retired, Mr. Bashover has done many things and traveled to many places, including the Philippines where "The Cache" is set, but most interestingly he was an "engineer-inventor for slide-fastener (zipper) companies and dolls' eyes and dolls' voices manufacturers." One of his numerous patents is for "the 'Double Zip,' a separable zipper that opens from the bottom." How *about* that; we're impressed.

In recent months we've brought you three stories by Terry Black (see "Repeat Busi-

(continued on page 105)

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FICTION

Finnegan's Leap

by Sherrard Gray

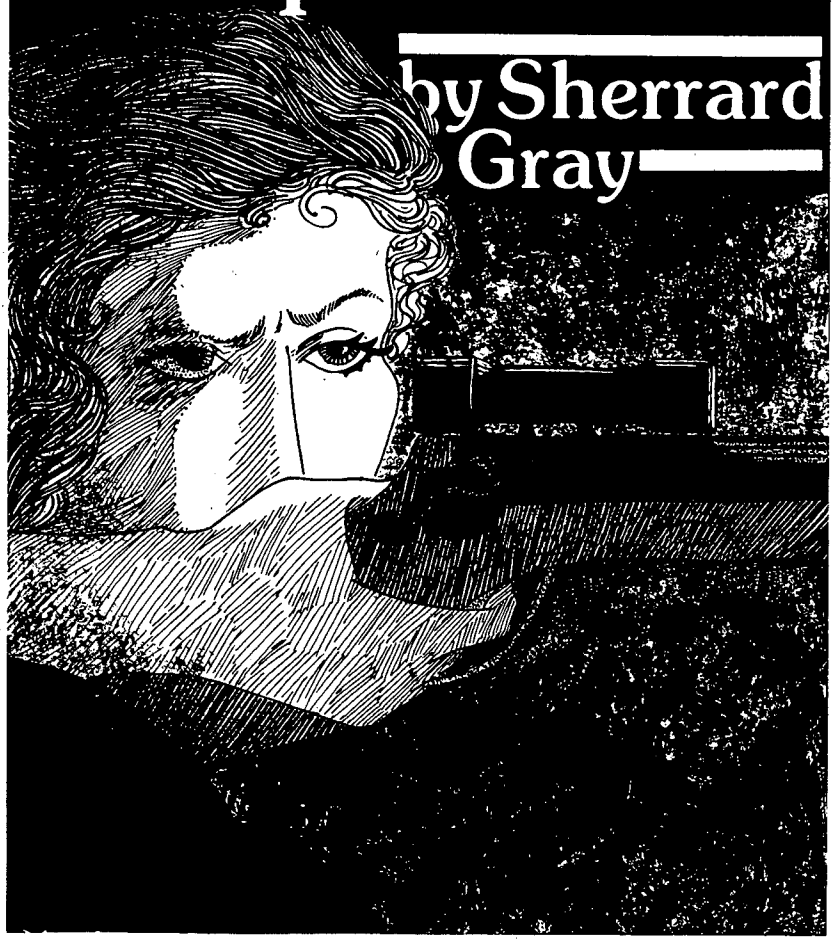


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Water dripped from a stalactite into a pool beside her, making silver ripples like an engagement ring. The damp, carboniferous air filled her nostrils. Goosebumps ran up her arm like birdshot.

Whatever you do, she told herself, don't look up, but even as she thought this she lifted her eyes and saw the brown furry ceiling; the brown furry *living* ceiling pulsing in a thousand places.

She forced her eyes away from the bats. Focus on him, on Dwight. On what he has done. She picked the thing off the damp limestone and dragged herself into the alcove off the cave's main corridor to the dime-sized hole. She looked down at Farmer's Field where the Hooties and Catamounts were playing: men in blue and white flannel suits hitting, running, throwing, talking it up.

It was a blazing July day, only one or two wisps in the sky, the leaves of the maple behind home plate glittering like emeralds. With a screwdriver she reamed out the hole to the size of her fist and waited for the Catamounts to take the field.

Chatter rose from the diamond. "C'mon, Dean, poke that sonofagun. He can't pitch. Got nothing on the ball but wishful thinking." And other voices, from above; from the scrubland atop Finnegan's Leap where half a dozen boys were playing Star Trek with plastic lasers and blasters and a blue VW hood that represented a space ship and when you crouched on it no one could shoot you.

She looked back where she had come from, at the smooth glistening rock, the shadowy crannies, the black spaces where the cave branched off to wind its murky way deeper into the bluff. At the far end was a faint smudge of light from the blocked entrance. She turned back to the baseball field.

The inning was over. He was leaning forward on the bench, fishing under it for his glove. Standing up now, slapping his glove against his knee, and starting to trot across the grass.

She raised the Remington, catching the scope in her shirt, wrenching it free. With a sudden spasm of dread, she realized what the noise would do to the bats, they'd be down on her in a swarm, the cave would be alive. But it was too late to worry about that, too late to worry about anything.

She rested the barrel on the inner edge of the opening and tracked him as he jogged across the diamond. He reached his position in right field, turned, punched his glove and waited

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for the first pitch. The crosshairs lined up on his dark head just under the blue cap, don't move, steady, steady.

He staggered forward, right arm thrown out, the glove sailing off on its own, and sprawled face down on the green turf. The play continued as if nothing had happened. The pitcher completed his delivery, the ball sped toward the plate, the batter swung and popped up. The white sphere climbed against the dark green of the maple-clad hill across the street. But now the first baseman was turning, staring at his fallen teammate. A man on the sidelines started to run toward him.

The noise had been deafening. Black sound roared in her ears. She hunched her shoulders waiting for the bats, but they never came. A half dozen separated from the brown mass and flew about the cave, confused, but most did not move. The sound must have been muffled by the jutting shoulder of rock that separated her from the main thrust of the corridor.

Carrying the rifle, she retraced her steps over the slippery rocks and came to the black hole in the floor of the cave that led to a limitless void. For three or four seconds the rifle made no sound and then bounced off a rock, careened into a sidewall of the shaft, and went clattering down into oblivion. She reached the entrance and pulled the rock aside. She squeezed out into the miraculous July sunlight, repositioned the rock and a clump of screening elderberry, and crept low enough through the scrub toward the rear of the cliff. A siren wailed at the town end of Painter Road, but it was eerily quiet on the ballfield.

A shout reached her from above where the boys had been stalking one another with high-tech weaponry. "That's no heart attack, you guys. Look at his head! *Jesus!*"

She reached the thick, luxuriant cedar and plunged in, crossed the stream and came to the tote road winding through the softwood. Her faithful blue Nova was waiting behind a stand of cat spruce.

"Good girl," she whispered, patting the machine as if she had half expected it to tire of waiting and amble off on its own. She slid behind the wheel and turned the key. It was over. She had done it. Even if they caught her now—and the chances were good they would—she had done it. Dwight Hamner was no more.

Chief John Marshall, in a navy blue suit, stood in the background at the Long View Ceme-

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tery and studied the mourners. It was a warm, cloudy day with a lusty breeze whipping over the crest of the valley. On the other side of the valley from the cemetery sprawled the new nursing home.

There was something a little odd about the gathering. He wasn't sure what at first and then it dawned on him that no one seemed devastated by the loss. No one except an elderly man, Dwight's father from Chicago, who stood near the minister, shoulders slumped, staring glassily at the coffin. The wind ruffled his iron-gray hair. Next to him were the deceased's wife Sarah and their seventeen-year-old daughter Ashley; they looked sad, yes, but not overwhelmed. More like the sadness one feels when another failed life has ended. Sarah was a slender woman with a French twist of ash blonde hair. She was attractive even with the purple bruise around one eye and the swollen cheekbone. Next to Ashley was Sarah's mother, Charity, her seventy-year-old face drawn and melancholy. Two men in rayon suits and a rather svelte woman in black from Harry's, the discount department store where Dwight had worked as a floor manager, a scattering of cousins, a dozen or so acquaintances and neighbors, and that was it.

Marshall didn't feel comfortable attending the funeral, he had barely known the deceased and hadn't liked him. But you never knew, the murderer might be lurking in the background, avidly watching everyone's reaction. Or did that only happen in movies? He didn't think the killer was one of this crowd.

Then who was he? The chief, along with a state police sergeant, had checked out the scene of the crime the afternoon of the shooting and found nothing. The next day Ballistics had sent him their report: a .243 slug had entered the base of the skull at approximately a forty-five-degree angle, which meant Finnegan's Leap. But the only people on top of the ledge were five boys, aged nine to twelve, horsing around with toy space guns. Well, a twelve-year-old boy could pull a trigger with the same deadly results as a thirty-year-old man. But with four others nearby?

There were clumps of spruce and juneberry along the top; a killer could have hidden in one, but that was unlikely with five boys galloping around. And if he had managed to remain concealed, his chances of escaping undetected were poor. On the south side of the cliff the vegetation was continuous and thick, running all the way back to the woods, but the angle

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didn't suit Ballistics. So where did that leave him? One of the boys—which meant all of the boys. Sure.

Marshall had found one shell casing at the cliff edge, for a .410 shotgun. Someone shooting a crow probably, or maybe the motel billboard that stood off the left field foul line: TUCK IN AT TUCKER'S HOME-COOKING CABLE TV POOL. The billboard was a favorite target for amateur marksmen and had more holes than a collander.

He had talked to the oldest boy, Lucas Scithers, on the athletic field at U-78. School hadn't started yet, but Lucas and some pals were kicking a soccer ball around. He walked across the manicured grass, a .357 swinging on his hip, a wide-girthed man with a lined face that had seen it all, trying not to limp from the gout in his left foot, feeling absurd walking toward a dozen boys in shorts and athletic socks with his pistol, flashlight, radio, billy club, handcuffs, keys, enough *crap* to sink a PT boat, dangling from his hips, thinking: Two more years and I'll have thirty in and if you don't think I'm gonna turn in my badge, buddyboy, you're stone crazy. Should've done it ten years ago. Live like a human being. Not some guy people cringe from as if his jaw were rotting off—until they're in an accident or being robbed, of course, and then see how loud they holler. Where the hell *were* you when I needed you?

"Hello, Lucas."

"No way, man. I didn't do nothin'."

A couple of Lucas's friends snickered.

"I know you didn't," said John Marshall, "but maybe you saw someone who did."

"You mean when that guy Hamner was shot playing ball? Creepy, wasn't it?"

Marshall nodded. "You didn't hear or see anything, Lucas? Someone running into the woods? A car starting up somewhere?"

"Zero." Lucas was chubby with lank pale brown hair and hamhocky knees. Over his shorts hung an open vest that showed a round gut crisscrossed with scratches and smudged with dirt. "I didn't hear no gunshot neither. I mean we were playing, we were making noise. We were shooting each other, right?" His friends twittered nervously. "With fake blasters. War of the Planets, that kind of stuff. Kid stuff. Who, me? See something? No way, Jose."

It was the same story with the other four boys, only they weren't as cocky about it as Lucas; they were more humanly scared and also respectful. "Gee, no, officer. Gosh, I'm sorry."

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The wind whipped at the minister's surplice, whispered it around his legs. "'. . . The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore.'"

He watched intently as Sarah, the wife, approached the lowered coffin. She didn't appear to have taken any pains to conceal her bruises, say with eyeshadow or talcum powder. She wasn't flaunting them, but neither was she trying to put on a fake front. She scooped up a handful of dirt from the mound and held it in her fist over the grave, not letting go. Her face was strained, somber, but not crushed. No, not crushed. Her long dark lashes were still, her cheeks dry.

My God, is she going to hold that gravel in her fist all afternoon? Let go, lady! Let go! This doesn't look good.

Sarah opened her hand from high above and the stones rustled on the aluminum casket.

She didn't sound exactly overjoyed over the phone when he said he wanted to talk to her again. He had talked to her briefly the day of the murder. She sighed and said, "I guess you have to, don't you? A murder? Yes, you have to, it's your job. I'll be here."

He parked under a locust tree and lumbered up the cracked walk against the wind. The two story frame house looked in need of serious repair. It was in the same precarious state as his own body: still upright, still functioning, but could collapse any minute.

He sat in the kitchen, sideways, at the scarred Formica table.

"Coffee?" she asked, unsmiling, wary. The bruise around her left eye was shading from purple into a cloudy yellow, and the eye itself was watery. Either someone had poked her a good one or she had run into a door. And we know who that someone is. Was. Big Piney's a small town, three thousand, you know who's pounding who, especially if you're a cop. Twice he'd been called to this address to break up a domestic disturbance. The first time was in the middle of the night. He and Sergeant Peterzell had found her sitting at this very same table with a broken jaw and Dwight watching a late-late movie in the living room. They took him to the lockup in Ravensburg to cool off, and the next morning she dropped charges. The second time they found both her and the daughter, Ashley, roughed up, faces puffy, lips split, the daughter's left arm almost torn out of its socket, but no Dwight. The bastard had jumped into

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his car. When he came home two days later, Marshall told him, One more time, sonny, and we'll throw your ass in jail and lose the key. And Dwight had laughed. Sure, he said, but it'll take you five years 'cause I know the law, I got friends. I can tie you and your legal system into knots.

Didn't look like there would be a third time.

He looked up at her from the metal side chair. "Sure, coffee's fine. A dab of milk, no sugar." Comely woman even with that nasty shiner. And smart. Secretary for the largest realtor in Big Piney. She hadn't been at the ballfield at the time of the shooting. She'd had that Saturday afternoon off and was shopping in Crosbyville, or so she said in their first interview the evening of the murder. She was vague about her movements—"I don't look at my watch every time I step into a store"—and he had found a saleswoman at the Artisan's Hand who was pretty sure she'd waited on her but couldn't pinpoint the time any closer than an hour.

Digging. He was going to have to do some digging. But was he up to it? He had better be up to it. The state's attorney would climb all over him if he laid back and twiddled his thumbs on this. Marshall sipped his coffee, nerving himself to ask his first question.

"You're not going to like this, Mrs. Hamner, but I have to ask."

The shadow of a smile played across her lips. She was standing away from him, leaning against the sink counter. "Where did I get this shiner?"

The chief colored a little and nodded.

"Dwight. Came home drunk, let's see, last Thursday, raving about the engine on his Ranger that was burning oil. Said he had to leave it at McCoy Auto the next day and he'd need my car. I was to ride to work with a friend. I told him no, and he popped me one. I kicked him, he popped me again and . . . I quit. I started crying. There was something in his eyes I hadn't seen before, a craziness. A blankness. I think he was over the edge." She looked at him a long time, her face sorrowful but not unfriendly. "Did I kill him? Is that your next question?"

"Okay."

The smile broadened briefly and disappeared. "No."

The silence hung between them. The clock over the sink ticked, the yellow Frigidaire kicked in, humming.

"Who then? Did Dwight have any enemies?"

"Enemies?" She brushed a strand of brown hair away from

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her bruised eye. "Sure, he had enemies. He wasn't a very likeable guy. He'd pulled some shrewd business deals, left a few people holding the bag."

"Oh?"

"Remember that cellulose insulation business he started with three partners? Chapter 11. Somehow he came out of it with more money than when he went in."

"Do you think one of his partners might have been upset enough to shoot him?"

She looked at him for a long time, her expression unfathomable. He wondered what made her tick. Why had she married such a loser? Look at her. She was thirty-five now, battered and disillusioned. Ten years ago she was really something, men got kinks in their necks when she walked by. Then Dwight failed at his first business, a TV repair shop, and bitterness set in. He started beating on her and running around, drinking. Does she hate us all now? he wondered. He wanted to say or do something that would show her not all men were creeps, but what? Get up and pat her on the shoulder? She'd probably think he was making a clumsy pass. And then a chill passed through his broad shoulders and he thought, You're stone crazy, John. You're sitting here with a murder suspect, and you want to reach out like a preacher or welfare worker.

"No," she said, "I don't. That was three years ago. If they were going to shoot him, they would have done it already." She jerked her head up at the sound of the doorbell, then the door opening, feet in the foyer. Her mother walked into the kitchen and went straight to her daughter and hugged her. She brushed a skein of hair off Sarah's forehead, straightened her collar, and turned to face Marshall, who was standing.

He liked Charity Kane. He could talk to her, relate to her. She was a little older, seventy, but they were essentially contemporaries. They had both grown up before TV and VCR's, before sex and four letter words were taken for granted, when electric toasters and cars were still a luxury. My God, was it really like that fifty years ago or did he just dream it? Because the world was scooting past John Marshall and at first he had been amused by his obsolescence but now it scared him a little. Life was tough, but what made it easier to bear was the feeling that we were all in the same boat. Now he wasn't so sure. Now it seemed to him there were a lot of boats out there and they were all different.

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But he and Charity were in the same boat, flew the same colors, squinted at the same sunset. Still, she was different. Sympatico, but, yeah, a little odd, though odd in a nice way. She lived near the rec center, and his beat sometimes took him past her ground floor apartment, she'd be out working on her flowers. A whole hedge of tea roses. Her husband had been a professor at Lincoln College, dead now ten years, and the two of them had been a pair. They had livened up Big Piney, you could say. Transplants from Connecticut, but good transplants, not condescending snobs. They had started a theater group, Shakespeare, O'Neill, a couple of unpronounceable European names, she tooted on a flute, and he twanged a viola de something. They drove a 1940 Hudson Hornet, did some other oddball stuff he couldn't remember. Oddball but harmless. He liked them both.

Charity had not remarried. She worked now as a part-time physical therapist at the nursing home. He had danced with her once at the Foreign Legion Hall, a polka, the two of them swirling around the floor like autumn leaves. But that was seven, eight years ago, before his two hernias and gout and high blood pressure.

There was something else, something really unusual, that Charity and Wes used to do, had a funny name, but he couldn't pull it out of his hat.

"Sit down, John. How are you?"

"Good."

Her face crinkled in a smile.

"Well, you know," he said. "I won't say I'm great. Sore foot for one thing, but that's par for the course. If I didn't hurt somewhere, I'd be worried. I was just talking to Sarah here, asking some questions. Routine stuff. I guess I'll have to ask you a few things, too."

"I understand." Her voice kind, helpful. She leaned against the sink beside her daughter.

"I'll have to ask where you were at the time of the murder, Charity."

"I was having a music lesson with Rose Carmagnola."

"Oh. Okay." He wrote that down in his pad. Sipped his coffee. The wind rattled a loose gutter. The next door neighbor, Koepp, was mowing his lawn on a John Deere rider, Expos cap tilted over his nose, retiree's paunch sagging over his belt.

"Don't you have some cookies, honey?" said Charity.

Her daughter frowned, seemed to come away from a quiet, private place. "All we have are fig Newtons."

"No no no no no." The chief

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waved his hand. But the last two no's had started to fade like a car that won't start, and Charity noticed.

"Nonsense. A big man like you needs his nourishment." Her eyes twinkled but not sarcastically; she knew his fondness for food, especially sweets, and she accepted it as she accepted the sun, the rain, the wind that was whipping the grass from Koepp's machine like an emerald contrail. "The only problem is they aren't homemade." She set the plate before him on the Formica.

The way she set it down brought a catch to his throat; her quickly stepping back as if afraid he might scold her, and then watching his face to gauge his reaction to the cookies. Like Nan. Just like Nan. But don't dwell on her, fella, not now. Leave that alone because you're empty inside, you've got no more tears, crying is like the dry heaves now, and even as he thought this his heavy fist on the table clenched. And Charity saw it.

"Is . . . everything all right, John?"

"Jim Dandy. A-OK." He ate a cookie. "Well, folks, it's been good talking to you." He rose, hardware clanking. "Don't know if I've learned anything. This is a tough one. No leads so far."

Charity walked him to the door. He started down the walk and turned. She looked frail and small, not much over a hundred pounds. She was still active, though. Her job at the nursing home, a volunteer in the ELF Program at the local elementary school. Grit. Grit and kindness. Not a bad combination.

She waved to him and he lumbered back to his squad car, and for a while the gout didn't bother him.

It was one o'clock when Marshall drove up to Finnegan's Leap. The Leap was a ledge fifty feet high that formed the easternmost boundary of Farmer's Field. No one had ever hit a ball onto the ledge, but once or twice each summer a sinewy farm boy managed to reach the cliff itself. When that happened, the opposing team was supposed to pitch in and buy the slugger a case of suds and they usually did—and helped him drink it, too. The drop was called Finnegan's Leap because back in the 1800's an unrequited lover by that name reportedly did a swan dive off it. Legend had it that he survived, though not in very good shape. Spent the rest of his life hitching himself around like a crab.

Standing at home plate, Chuck "Zoom Zoom" Beaure-

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gard, a burly logger with a sandy mustache, was hitting fungoes to three boys. Marshall motored to the right side of the cliff, parked and got out.

The air was breathless and warm. Nothing moved in the scrub, no birds, field mice, chipmunks. Lunch and siesta time for everything except Beauregard and a few air-conditioned cars on Painter Road oblivious to the heat and dust. The chief was out of uniform, in a short-sleeved khaki shirt and twill pants and sneakers. Gun in the glove compartment.

He huffed to the top of the bluff and poked around, not sure what he was looking for but there had to be something up here. Some hiding place he had missed. Because, damnit, a man was shot standing in the right field Saturday afternoon in front of sixty people and we know the killer was somewhere on this ledge. He wasn't in an airplane, he wasn't on the cliff face itself—unless all sixty people were blind—and he wasn't on the ballfield, so he had to be up here. He hitched himself around in the heat, checking each boulder, each clump of brush, hoping for a larger print to show up among the scuff-marks of the boys, or a cigarette stub, a shell, something, and knowing even as he looked that he wasn't going to be that lucky. A sinking feeling grew in his stomach. Despite the heat, a chilling suspicion that one of those five boys had done it, probably with an accomplice. The accomplice's job being to divert the others while the killer slipped back into the woods with the rifle.

With a sigh he walked back to the stream, limped up and down, scuffed leaves with his shoe, half tore apart a brush pile, got on his hands and knees and eyeballed the inside of a rotting yellow birchlog. Nothing. The kid had probably come back that night and picked up the weapon.

Then the first real break in the case. Farther in the woods, tire tracks that didn't look that old. Looked like a car, fairly good tread, he'd have to come back with plaster. And two prints, not very clear, but they were there and they were boy-sized.

John Marshall did not swear often, even to himself, but he did now. Shit, he thought walking back to his car, we got something kooky here. A twelve-year-old pulling the trigger. A sixth-grader! I got a grandson who's in sixth grade.

He leaned against his car, staring sightlessly at the elderberry bush huddled against the cliff a few feet away, wishing he'd retired at twenty. Going

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for thirty was not the brightest idea.

He got in the squad car, and then slowly climbed out again. That bush looked funny. Probably nothing, but we are thorough if nothing else. We leave no stone unturned.

The bush had been broken. Well, so had a lot of bushes, maybe one of the kids had clambered down the side of the ledge and hung out here for a while to catch his breath. Then he realized it wasn't the bush that looked funny, it was that flat rock behind it. Tilted as if covering something.

The rifle? Was the .243 behind that rock?

His sixty-year-old ticker going faster than it had in months, maybe years, the old cop bent over and pulled away the rock and felt a gust of damp, cool air. For ten seconds he did not move, did not think, did not breathe —just stared at the black hole.

He crouched and put his arm in, knowing what he would find, and for once he was right: nothing. More hole. Because what we have here, John babe, is a cave. His heartbeat drummed in his ears.

No, he thought. I ain't going in *there,* thank you. Probably wouldn't even fit. Crouching, his hammy thighs spread, he peered into the hole's murky depths, smelled its damp effluvium that reminded him of a clogged sink. He went back to the car for a flashlight, saw that the fungo-hitter and the three boys had left. The beam picked out a tunnel with a dripping ceiling and smooth, slimy walls that meandered into the bluff and vanished behind a shoulder of rock. The cave must angle near the bluff face and, in at least once place, there must be an opening large enough for a rifle barrel. So maybe I can spot the hole with my binocs, he thought, and save myself squirming over those grassy rocks. He got a pair of nine-power Japanese glasses from his car and walked down in front of the bluff and swung the glasses back and forth, scouring the wall. He trudged back to the elderberry. If there was a hole, the killer had plugged it up.

Did that mean he had to actually go in there? Man, give me a break. For twenty-five grand a year? You gotta be kidding.

Forty feet into the cave, his light picked out the sudden hole in the floor and instinctively he shrank back. He shone his light down into the depths where the shaft turned. A person could fall in there and end up speaking Chinese. He crawled wide of the hole on slippery stone and

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loose marl. A dim shout from the ballfield reached him, the sound of a ball cracking off a bat. Rounding a corner, he saw a pencil of sunlight angling through the gloom like a bullet. A movement caught his eye overhead, a shifting. Brown moss? Some sort of thick lichen? He canted his flashlight and saw with a silent choking scream of horror that it was a ceiling of living bats. He quickened his sluglike crawl to where the light penetrated the sidewall.

He peeled away a small rock and peered down at the field. A dozen boys had started a pickup game of softball. He had a good view of right field. Of a boy in sawed-off jeans and a painter's cap. The boy hitched up his pants and yelled something to the pitcher. His head was less than two hundred feet away.

Marshall's hand touched something small and round and lifted it to the light. He stared at it, and suddenly a word popped into his mind, that odd thing that Charity and her husband used to do together years ago. *Spelunking*. Exploring caves. He rested his forehead on cool rock and the rock seemed to quiver and recede, and the ground underneath, the whole cave, to shudder and dissolve, leaving him suspended in a dank howling void.

The piano teacher, Rose Carmagnola, squinted at him in the doorway of her bungalow on Pennywise Lane. "I hope I'm not a suspect, Mr. Chief of Police."

"John."

Miss Caramagnola was clothed in a silk muumuu; copper rings the size of dinner plates dangled from her ears. Her jowly face was camouflaged with mascara, eyeliner, rouge, lipstick, and talcum powder; a fake black mole adorned her right cheek. Waves of perfume emanated from her ample person. "Not formal enough. Trouble with society today, everybody's John, Jane, Daisy, Mac. Or, the most hideous of all titles: Ms. *Ms.* I don't know what I am, but I am not a Ms. Shall we go into the garden? There's a ghost of a breeze and one of my pupils is playing in the living room. So I'm not being charged with anything? Good. Or maybe not good. That would make life exciting."

They took wrought-iron chairs in the back lawn in the shade of a grape arbor. She folded her hands in her lap and waited.

He'd been dreading this interview since leaving Farmer's Field two hours ago. He did not want to hear what she was going to tell him. He noticed with a start that the hands on his knees were white-knuckled.

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He willed his flesh to relax. "Charity Kane? Is she a pupil of yours?"

"Yes."

He could ask some innocuous question such as how long has she been a student, and get the hell out of there and forget the whole thing. And then turn in his badge.

"Did Charity have a lesson last Wednesday afternoon?"

Miss Caramagnola swatted away a nosy fly with a plump flipper, smoothed out her muu-muu, and said, "Yes. Three to four."

Dwight Hamner had been shot at approximately three twenty. Marshall was surprised at how relieved he was. His big blunt-fingered hands relaxed, the muscles in his neck unwound, his breath evened out. He shifted in his chair. Leaf shadows played over the grass. Piano music trilled from the house, bespeaking speed and grace. That was a student? He wondered how many years of music lessons it took to reach that level. It would be nice to be able to play like that. But she was lying, she had to be.

"You're protecting her," he said.

The music teacher's face, or at least the parts that weren't painted, turned scarlet. She lifted her three chins. "All right, I am. Arrest me if it'll make you happy. But let me tell you something. You've seen her daughter, she's not rich. Far from it. Yet she's been paying for Charity's lessons for two years now. And I am not cheap, even for my friends. It would break Sarah's heart, I think, if she knew that now and then her mother played hookey. But I suppose you have to spill the beans?"

"Charity's a suspect in the murder of her son-in-law."

For a full minute the large woman said nothing, but her composure was clearly gone. Finally, realizing her mouth was wide open, she closed it. Marshall was pretty sure —certain, in fact—that it was not an act. "Charity? Charity Kane? Mr. Chief, are you in your right mind?" The piano teacher laughed grimly. "I don't know who killed that man, but it was not her. Shall I give you my personal opinion?"

He looked at the massive, daubed woman in the filigreed chair. He suspected that when she stood she would have to hold the chair down with her hands; otherwise it would rise with her. He had a brief flash of Miss Carmagnola waddling across the grass with a white lawn chair attached to her stern.

"Drop the case. Dwight Hamner was a—pardon my French —bastard. Why Sarah ever

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married him I'll never know. Their marriage was proof that love is blind. That Cupid can be a little snot." She wrenched her head toward the french doors leading into the music room where they could see a boy with a headband bent intently over a Steinway. "He's starting the scherzo. Needs to relax his left hand more." The music crashed and rippled, dived and swooped. Miss Carmagnola frowned, but it seemed to be a forgiving frown. Even a proud one. She turned back to Marshall. "He broke Sarah's jaw once. Did you know that?"

"Yes."

"Came home at three A.M., loud, drunk, stinking. When she suggested he sleep on the living room couch, he flew into a rage." Her eyes narrowed in their pockets of flesh. "When Ashley was ten, he broke her nose. Did you know that, Mr. Chief of Police? You didn't, did you? He broke his own daughter's nose. I am a religious person. Yes, I know that's passe these days, but I don't give a hoot. I believe in a Supreme Being and what's more I respect and fear that Being, yet I say to you, with God as my witness, that I am glad Dwight Hamner is dead. *Glad.*"

Marshall said nothing. The pianist was still expounding Beethoven, but he didn't hear it. His pulse thudded in his wrist. He had seen anger before, countless times, but Rose Carmagnola's wrath was different; it was elemental, it reached backward and forward in time; it was not the spite of one person, it was the outrage of a species. It wiped out the music and the fluttering shadows and the bright green grass and left only his pounding pulse and her quivering face.

"I would like to know who killed him as much as you, Mr. Chief of Police. Can you believe that?"

"Yes."

"But not for the same reason. I would like to know so that I could thank him."

The music tumbled and soared and then like a stooping hawk dived toward its prey and landed with a resounding crash. Mr. Chief of Police heard it not.

He saw her coming out of the ice cream parlor, the Latest Scoop. She was alone and there was a faint smudge of chocolate on the tip of her nose. He almost laughed. Almost but not quite.

He was in uniform, short-sleeved shirt, lightweight brown pants, the hardware store around his waist. It was a dark cloudy day, the air smelled heavily of rain.

"You too, John?"

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"Me too?"

"Can't stay away from ice cream?"

"Oh. No. Just taking a swing down Main. Have to get out of my cruiser once in a while." Tendrils of pain climbed up his left leg. The drought had been good for his gout. They needed a good soaker, though.

"Do you know what I think?"

Chief John Marshall desolately shook his head. He had not gotten a warrant for her arrest. You could call it what you wanted, but in simple language it was a dereliction of duty. He was a bad cop. Again he had that feeling of unreality he'd had in the cave: nothing solid, the sidewalk and the Latest Scoop and one of Beauregard's logging trucks opposite them, its air brakes squawking for a red light, shimmering, dissolving. The chocolate smudge weaved in front of him, the crinkled blue eyes danced.

"I think it's going to rain. I really do. Tomorrow you'll just see everything growing, sprouting, turning green. It'll be like spring all over again. John Marshall, are you all right?"

"Is this yours?"

She looked at the bone button in his hand. He thought he remembered the shirt it belonged to: a blue one with yellow stitching on the collar. He'd seen her pruning her tea roses in it once. He had thought, How elegant, a silk shirt with bone buttons, a rattan hat, tea roses. English. An English countess in her garden. He had smiled then as he tipped his hat and exchanged pleasantries.

"It's a lovely button, John, but I'm afraid it's not mine." She watched him, unsmiling. Waiting. She was calm. A small smile on her fine lips. Not an ironic smile nor a sly one. Just a small smile.

He put out his hand, turned hers over, and placed the button in her palm. "Take it anyway. It's a cinch I don't have a use for it." He slipped around her and lumbered on down the sidewalk trying not to limp.

"Is this some sort of joke, Mr. Chief of Police?"

He could feel the blood rush to his head. The piano teacher was something else. Talk about direct.

They stood in her mirrored vestibule. Someone was in the next room playing, badly. He thought it could be Bach.

"No, it's not a joke, is it?" said Rose Caramagnola. "I have to be certain, though. I do not take on pupils just for the money. The money is useful occasionally, but I do not labor with the insincere or the hopeless. I demand seriousness. And I get it." The pupil in the living room

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bungled a chord, making a sound like a ham dropped on the keys. The piano teacher's lips tightened.

"Can I start this afternoon?"

"Of course not. Do you think I run an exercise class here? I teach *music,* sir. In spite of that gibberish you're hearing now."

John Marshall stared down at the rug, holding his hat. He did not know what he was in the presence of, but it was something. He had to admit she did not run an exercise class.

"Go home and think about it. Listen to Chopin. If you don't have Chopin, get Chopin and listen to him. Do you hear me? *Listen to him.*"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Then call me in two weeks."

A sloppy arpeggio issued from the next room and two spots of color leapt to her plump cheeks.

Marshall nodded. "Yes, ma'am."

"Maybe one week." She looked toward the door of the music room. "Yes, call me in one week. I will have one less pupil by then."

SPECIAL NOTICE TO READERS

The Winter Double Issue 1989 marked the beginning of a new development for you, the addition of double issues to our magazine's schedule.

As you know, AHMM comes to you every four weeks, or thirteen times a year. Your October 1990 issue will also be virtually double the size of a standard one, providing you with about twice as many stories. Another double issue will arrive, as last year, four weeks after the December 1990 issue, replacing the former Mid-December issue.

In 1991 we plan a June double issue instead of the October one. A Winter Double Issue will be published in 1991 also.

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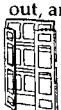
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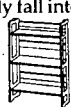
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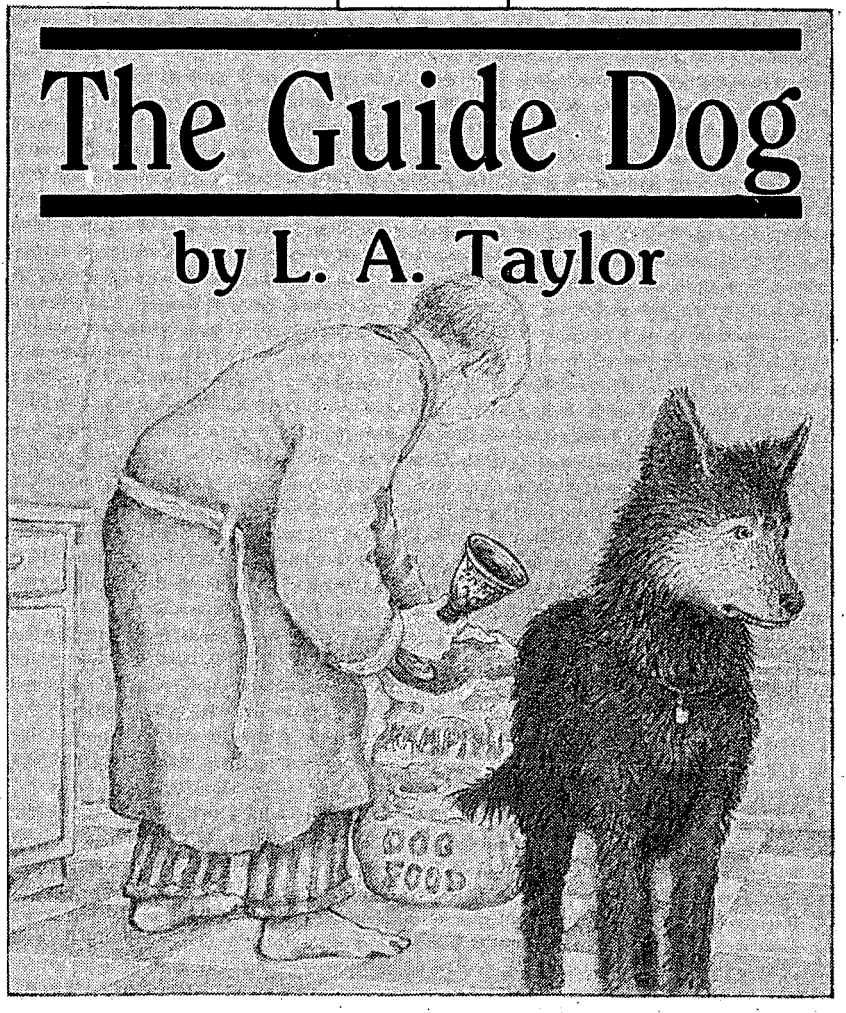
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The Guide Dog

by L. A. Taylor



Prince lifted his muzzle from his paws and opened his eyes upon the semi-dark. His ears lifted and moved forward, although what he had perceived was not precisely sound: more like a wisp of the aura that surrounded his own name, mumbled in a stranger's mind.

Again, an instant's glitter. Someone outside the high windows of the north, almost buried end of the small house, someone think-

Illustration by Donald Cook

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ing of the chink and glow of metal. The thought felt warm.

Prince stiffened his forelegs under him and hitched his bottom to sit facing the thought. Now he heard a real sound, the scrape of a tool against the window frame. The dog flipped an ear backward, toward his master's dream. No instructions. Only fragmented pictures, so weak that an image from the man outside the window blotted them out: something like a long leash holding the master to other men, something like scissors to cut the leash, something like a long thin yell for help down a thread of light fading.

He trotted over and put his cold nose into his master's hand, pushed against the palm, and was rewarded by a slowing of the whirl.

'Smattaboy? came the thought. A moment of confusion as the man woke and sorted Prince out from the other three dogs who had served him in the past. Then his mind opened, as far as it could, to the tendrils of Prince's own. His eyes and ears became linked to the dog's.

The whirling shadows steadied into the dim room Prince himself saw. The scrape of the tool came again: his master heard it too, through Prince's ears. Now instructions would come.

But first, puzzlement and fear.

The puzzlement cleared. The master rolled to one side and pressed a button beside the bed. His mind filled with a montage of men in dark clothing with shining badges, of flashing lights racing, of a worried circle with a third of it cut, pie-wise, away. Then, at last, the instructions came.

Prince slowly swept his head from side to side, pausing at each window. He felt a minute relaxation, a sense of reaching, and then his master's fingers gently buried themselves in the ruff of fur around his neck. Image of feet stepping downward. Prince looked toward the stairs so the master could descend with him from the sleeping loft. The man's mind tightened like a stretched cord. When he arrived at the bottom of the stairs he directed Prince to look at the new thing.

Prince had looked, only that afternoon, more closely at the new thing than he had really cared to do. But the master had wanted it, and that meant peering through the glass that made images bigger. Prince had sniffed, found the odors of other human hands tinged with the metal, but that had told the master nothing. The thing had a name: goblet. The name bore an aura of sour dark water, of pleasant senselessness, that puzzled the dog. For a moment, views of the big house now flitted through the master's mind,

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of the long drive bordered by blossoming shrubs up which he planned to ride this coming day, of the shining floors, the faces of servants. The images focused instantly on the room with the door-of-many-knobs where all the new things were kept. Regret, a cloud.

Then the master took the goblet from its case and with intense satisfaction did something utterly incomprehensible: he buried it deep in the big bag of dogfood in the corner of the cottage kitchen. Prince sat down, thrown for a loss by this breach of routine. *Heel,* came the master's thought.

Heel was a different command to Prince than to other dogs, he had discovered. Other dogs took a place at their master's left side and ran after him, but Prince had been taught to move close, almost to lean against his master's leg, and look only in the direction his knee pointed, so that he would know exactly where he was going. When not at heel, Prince glanced every three or four seconds toward his master, so the man would know where he was in relation to what he was seeing. The master was proud to have learned this skill. Prince thought it unimpressive.

Now he looked up the stairs, since the master had moved to face them. At heel, he returned to the sleeping loft and the man got back into bed. Again, dark suits with shiny badges, a question: coming? Released from heel, the dog jumped onto the foot of the bed and looked at the windows. A splintering noise came from behind the Venetian blinds.

Again, Prince caught the aura of dark, sour water, mixed this time with the picture of a small, round, white, edible wafer. Still he was certain that the someone behind the window (and the window was now groaning as it was eased out of its frame) was also thinking of the new thing, the goblet. Prince considered possible ways of informing his master of this astonishing fact and found none. He settled for putting his nose into the man's hand.

Okay, boy, came the thought. *Stay.*

Prince withdrew his nose and perched anxiously at the foot of the bed. Should he bark? Two legs were now hanging out from under the Venetian blind. He couldn't help one small whine.

"Hey, there's a dog in here," said a voice. Prince caught the picture, a big black and tan dog not at all like himself, and the answering flare of alarm. Two someones, then. He hadn't been paying close enough attention.

The alarm vanished. "It's only the guide dog," said a second voice. "I told you he was blind and deaf. It won't give us any trouble."

The legs dropped and became a whole man. Prince sat up and

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danced on his forepaws, but his master lay still.

"Guy's asleep," the man said to the window. When the intruder looked at the master, Prince caught another, stranger image: many, many pieces of gleaming metal, stacked in piles so high some had toppled. "Stay," the man said quietly. Prince didn't move, but that was only because his master had already given the same order.

The second man followed the first through the broken window. At the shining, the gems, the rich furry cloths, Prince thought his name had been called, but no. Again, the man was looking at the master.

Prince whined again, wanting instructions. He could feel his master's mind, alert behind the soft muscles of his face, but no instructions came. The two strangers went eagerly down the stairs from the loft into the living area. They walked under the loft.

"Hoo! Right on the table!" said one. "What the—it's empty!"

The case the new thing had been nestled in hit one of the long front windows of the house and sailed through. Shattered glass tinkled onto the deck. Prince felt the men questing back and forth. One reappeared and removed all the rectangular splotchy boards from the walls. Prince felt the stranger's keen disappointment. The man had been looking for a hole, a hole with a fine, strong gate, like the one in the big house. There was none.

"Where the hell could he have it?" one of them asked. "It's only a cottage; it's not that big."

"You sure he didn't take it to the bank?"

"Hell, yes. I told you, I had him in my sights all the way from the auction to the front door. Paid off the telecab and walked in with the thing in his hand."

"It's gotta be here, then."

More noises. Prince, obedient, crept on his belly to the railing of the loft and peeped over. The two strangers had taken all the cushions out of the chairs and were unzipping the covers.

"He'd have to do a helluva job of hollowing if it's in any of these," one man said. "And he's blind."

"He's got hands. And that psi-guide dog. I saw it looking over the lots at the auction, so it must be a good one."

"What money can't buy."

The search continued, but the master was apparently satisfied with what he had seen: silently he called Prince back to his bedside and told him to lie down and stay. Downstairs, frustration boiled in the dim house; the beams of the flashlights darted from place

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to place faster and faster. One stranger picked up the bag of dogfood and looked behind it while the other banged the cupboard doors open. The dogfood was set down—didn't they hear the high thin song of the metal goblet as the kibbles stroked it?—and the doors slapped shut. The two men stood in the kitchen breathing hard.

"Let's go wake him up," said the prime one.

They ran up the stairs. One of them shook the master. The master feigned waking. "Who are you?" he shouted. "What are you doing here?"

"You hear me?" The prime intruder put his face close to the master's. "You got that dog hooked up?"

"I hear you."

The speech became too rapid for Prince to follow. He let the images flow through his mind; his master could use his ears without his trying to comprehend the words himself. He wondered idly why the strangers were making such a fuss about the dirt road that led to the cottage, the lake, and the tall, dark, pointed trees, the long way the telecar with the flashing lights would have to come. Loneliness, that was what they tried to convey, he thought, but with so many lives out there among the trees, who could be lonely?

Of course, he reminded himself. Men have guards against the thoughts of others. Only their primitive senses receive.

The images of the talk blended more quickly, became violent: he saw himself, his feathery black fur matted with blood, and licked anxiously at one clean paw.

"What'll you do without the dog, hmm?" the prime man said.

"I can manage until I get another one," the master said. "An annoyance, that's all. But it's pointless to torture the beast. The goblet is safe, where you can't get to it. You've already searched the house—you should know that."

"It's gotta be here," the man insisted. "We saw you take it from the auction and come straight here."

"You saw me take the *case* from the auction," the master said, smiling.

"With the goblet in it. We're not that stupid."

The master put his fingers to his watch. The white circle in his mind shrank to a stingy slice. The speech flowed on. Prince let his nose down onto his paws and tried to stay awake, in case the master should need him.

Then there was deep pain. One eye could no longer see.

Against all training, Prince yelped, cried, tried to run away, but one of the strangers held him and the other tied his paws together.

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He whined and looked at the master with his one good eye, but the master's face was blank and no comfort came. There was a thing in the man's mind like the wind of midwinter.

"I've told you," the master said. "The goblet's not here. Now you've damaged the dog for nothing."

"You're a coldblooded bastard," one of the intruders remarked.

Why didn't the master tell them the goblet was downstairs in the bag of food? Such a simple thing to say. Then that stranger—planning to hurt more, soon—would take it and go away. The master could call the veterinarian and Prince would be helped, the pain would go away, the eye see. . . .

The master was thinking of other dogs, of four puppies that had become his eyes and his ears, each as the last grew old. The last was Prince himself. A glimpse of the psi-handler Prince had known in baby days. A flash of the training, infinitely long in Prince's memory but so short in his master's. Prince knew those other dogs. They had always lived in his master's mind. But here was an image of a new dog, a small, young dog . . .

The pain came again, worse.

"You're fools," the master said. There was a smile in his mind, but Prince could not see him.

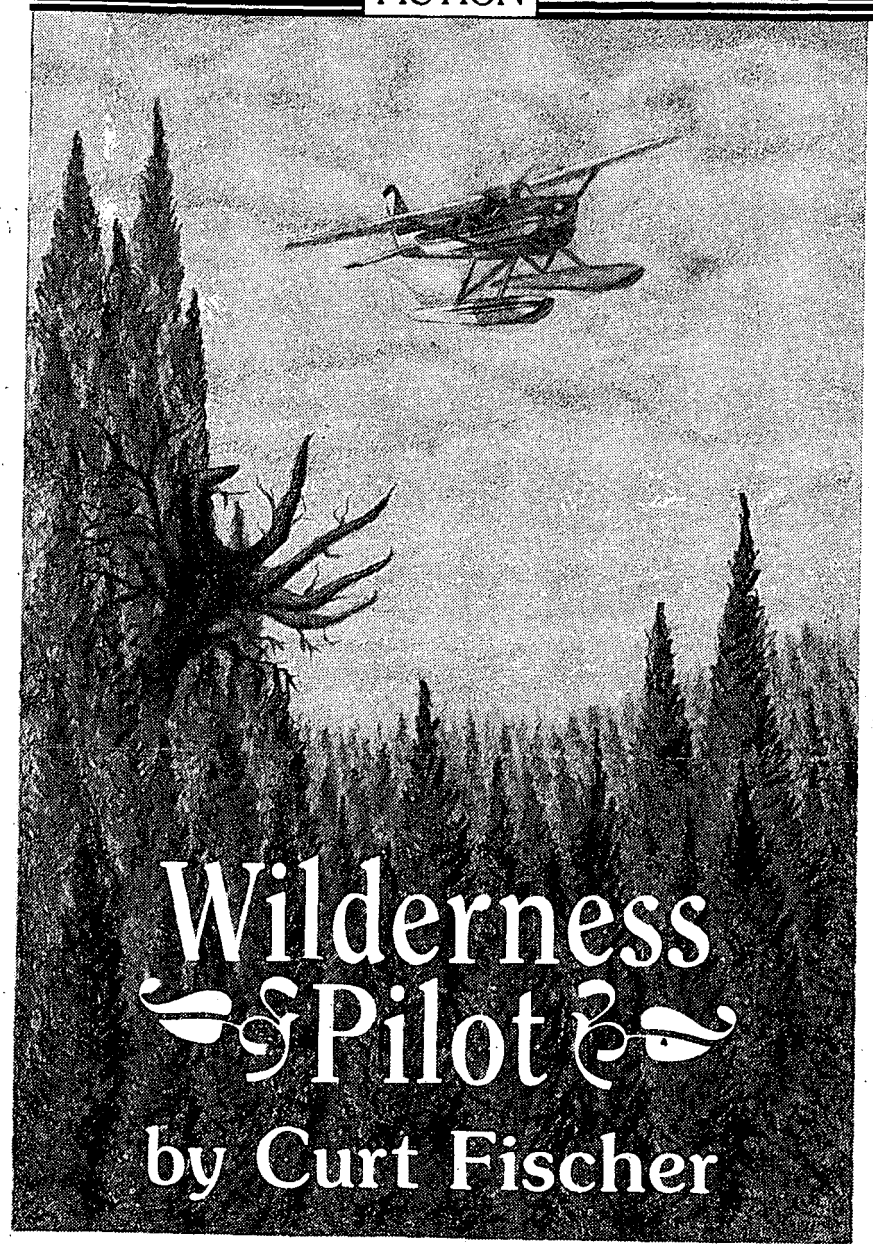
The night went on. The telecar with its flashing lights did not come. Instead, more pain.

I am dying, Prince wanted to say. Master, my end is coming. He thought of the goblet, shining with all its bits of faceted glass, downstairs in his bag of food. Why did the master want to keep it so badly? He must not understand what he was losing. As the dark and the silence closed in on both of them, Prince felt the master thinking again of the new dog and found room in his mind for pity.

No, master, you will not see again, Prince thought. No, you will never hear. You cannot take out that little card and trade a moment's use of it for another dog willing to lend his eyes and ears and heart. You think you will only because you are so unaware of the mind of any other creature. I know what you can never know: my end is etched in your brain. My dark is your dark, my silence your silence. You are lost forever.

After this, no other dog will ever guide you.

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Wilderness Pilot

by Curt Fischer

Illustration by Ralph Westbom

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Murch saw them coming. Their Suburban had rocked down the gravel road leading to the inlet and had come to an abrupt halt next to the metal dome that served as one of the hangars. Dust clung to the moist August air. When it cleared, the two men were standing next to their open doors, staring in his direction.

The driver, swarthy with dark, short-cropped hair and mirror sunglasses, motioned to the back of the brown Suburban with his head. Slamming his door, he took in the entire area while pivoting only his torso. Scraggly pine trees stretched down to the lapping water on the left. To the right were more hangars, the three cabins where Murch, the other two pilots, and their families lived, and, braced on a huge hunk of granite that reached into the water like an index finger, a wind sock. In the bay formed between the pines and the boulder was a floating pier near which two small float planes rocked back and forth in the water. Mirror Sunglasses swung his attention back to Murch, who was sitting on his porch staring back.

The other man, wearing shorts, tie-dyed T-shirt, and rather plain sunglasses, had, after a shake of his head, obeyed the driver's silent command and had unloaded the essentials from the back of the dirty Suburban: two large duffel bags and an ice chest. He said something to the driver that sounded like a distant dog barking, and Mirror Sunglasses responded by slowly gliding backward until he came astride the baggage. Each man picked up one duffel and then hefted the ice chest and, with what seemed to Murch to be an excess of effort, managed to carry it between them. Together they began walking toward Murch.

Murch knew who they were. At least he thought he recognized them. He pulled his Toronto Blue Jays baseball cap down farther on his head, hoping to hide his hair. He hadn't colored it in weeks and he was unsure how much of his natural bright red roots might be showing.

"Morning," said Tie-dyed when they got to the porch. In spite of Murch's earlier observation, it was now obvious that Tie-dyed was in charge.

"Afternoon," Murch responded after consulting his watch.

Tie-dyed looked at his own watch. "Afternoon? Hell. I guess you're right. Damn time change, know what I mean?"

Murch nodded.

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"Your plane?" Mirror Sunglasses asked, pointing to one of the red and white Piper Comanches, bobbing in the water.

"Nope," Murch answered nonchalantly.

"Where are the pilots?" Mirror Sunglasses asked.

"One is flying way down to Mille Lacs in Minnesota. One is eating lunch in that cabin over there with his wife and two kids, and one is sitting here, talking with you."

Mirror Sunglasses scowled, but Tie-dyed chuckled. "Thought you said it wasn't your plane?"

"It ain't. Belongs to the National Bank of Ontario. I just make the payments and do maintenance on it."

Tie-dyed liked that one and chuckled some more. "Yeah, yeah. Ain't it the truth?" He looked up at the sky, a deep blue today. Almost like those first warm days of spring when the blue is so syrupy that it makes one's blood thick and lazy. "Looking for somebody to fly us up to Black Stork Lake for some fishing."

Murch stiffened. They had no fishing gear, and Black Stork Lodge had made no arrangements to fly in any fishermen. "You got reservations at Black Stork?" he asked.

"Reservations? Sure. Made'm months ago. Why?"

Murch shrugged. "They normally let us know when to expect somebody. We fly in almost all their people." He stood up and stretched, pulling one of his wide red suspenders over his shoulder. "Name's Paul Thompson," Murch said, using his new name. "Get the rest of your gear, and I'll make sure the plane's ready."

"Got all our stuff right here," Tie-dyed said, indicating the duffels and the chest.

That's what I was afraid of, thought Murch, noting that neither had volunteered a name. Crunching down the pea gravel walkway toward the dock, he felt the hairs on the back of his neck at attention. How? How? he kept asking himself. A glance over his shoulder caught Mirror Sunglasses whispering to Tie-dyed, who was watching Murch carefully and nodding approval to whatever Mirror Sunglasses was saying.

While detaching the lesser guy lines, Murch gnawed his lip, analyzing his options while watching Mirror Sunglasses, who had arrived at the foot of the dock and was drinking from a flask provided by Tie-dyed. In terms of options, he had very few. And those few were disappearing as the two men's footsteps echoed on the floating wooden pier.

Murch opened the rear doors. "Toss your gear behind these

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seats, then climb in."

"I want to sit in front," demanded Mirror Sunglasses.

"Sorry. Nobody sits in front when it isn't necessary."

"Why not?"

Murch considered his response. "Policy," he said simply, helping them to store their gear and instructing them in the tightening of their seatbelts and the securing of their door latches. Detaching the last guy lines, he considered shoving the plane out into the lake and sprinted for his own Ford pickup, parked next to his cabin. Such a move would gain him precious minutes. But what if this was coincidence? What if these two really were just heading to Black Stork for some fishing? He'd be blowing a perfectly safe cover because of one foolish moment of fear. He sighed. At least he was sure of one thing. In the air he would be in control. He nervously swung up into the pilot's seat and fumbled with the switches. He bit down on his tongue to try to conquer his nerves, and then he proceeded to charm the motor into life.

Taxiing into the main body of the lake, the plane lurched with the small waves being lightly driven by a rising west wind. Murch could see a few billowy white clouds coming in from that direction. The loud, noisy chop of the engine making normal conversation impossible, Murch shouted over his shoulder, "We have to go clear over to the other side of the lake." He punctuated his statement with a pointing finger.

"Why?" shouted Tie-dyed, manifesting his ignorance of flying.

"We have to take off into the wind," he hollered back, indicating the wind sock.

As they taxied, they passed several dozen other float planes, the majority painted red or yellow.

"Those your national colors?" Tie-dyed shouted into his ear.

"What?"

"Bright red and white and yellow. All your planes. If not all over, at least on the wing tops. Red or white or yellow."

Murch shook his head. He hated to tell him. It was bad luck. "You're a hundred miles into our raw wilderness already. We'll be flying over pretty remote terrain. Even though we're only three hours from the States, some of this country has only seen a few lumberjacks. If something happens, you want to be spotted from the air quickly." To Murch's glee he noticed that Mirror Sunglasses, who hadn't spoken since boarding, had turned from a swarthy tan to white to green. If this was going to be trouble, little

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of it would come from him.

Reaching the far end of the lake, Murch turned the plane and donned his headphones. Picking up his microphone, he gave Helen Bleu his destination. Helen served as the local control tower from her wheelchair in her kitchen. She radioed back weather information and mentioned two other pilots in the air around the Black Stork Lake area. He thanked her. Although all the bush pilots could fly with instruments, most were "seat of the pants" visual boys, and he would have to watch for their planes. Murch had learned that when he was first moved to the Red Deer area.

"Make this flight often?" Tie-dyed asked as he looked about the shabby interior of the airplane. Paint was peeling from the simple instrument panel, which looked like it had taken a direct hit from a mortar round, the handset on the passenger side had a broken part dangling from it, and one of the side windows was cracked. The upholstery was ripped. Needles on a couple of the dials spun meaninglessly. From under the instrument panel wires obviously taped together protruded.

"Three or four times a day," Murch shouted back, bringing the plane to full throttle. He noted that Tie-dyed was also looking pale. "Worried because of the looks of the plane?" he asked, picking up on Tie-dyed's roving eyes. "Don't be. We spend every extra dime on engine and control maintenance and we let the non-essentials, those things not necessary to get the bird in the air, go to hell. This plane, old and beaten as she is, is mechanically in tiptop shape."

Leveling off at a mere twenty-five hundred feet, high enough for the bush, Murch pulled a cigarette from the vast pocket of his plaid shirt, cracked his vent window, and lit up. He didn't bother looking back. Up here, neither man would be a danger, and with the motor going full, conversation would be difficult anyway. Helen came on the radio, letting him know that a storm was brewing to the west of them, about two hours away, and that his partner had returned from Minnesota. Beneath them lay a quilt of brown land stripped of trees for the pulp industry, light green, recently replanted ground, the rich green of untouched forest, and a liberal sprinkling of sparkling blue from the numerous beautiful lakes of Ontario, heavily laden with mounds of green wooded islands. All the lakes looked like jewels strung together in bunches. Murch smiled to himself about his passengers' fears. Frankly, if

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something went wrong, there were hundreds of places to glide down to and set a float plane on.

"Where's Black Stork?" Tie-dyed yelled after about twenty minutes.

"Another twenty minutes."

"Any camps around here?"

The question disturbed Murch, but he tried not to show it. "A few."

The muzzle of the gun nestled against Murch's jaw, right under his ear. "Find a lake with none!" commanded Tie-dyed. Turning slightly, Murch could see that Mirror Sunglasses was indisposed, but that Tie-dyed had thoroughly taken over the situation.

"I know this is a dumb question," Murch yelled, "but who the hell's going to fly this thing, if I land and you shoot me? You plan to walk back to Red Deer?"

"Shoot you? Why the hell should I shoot you?" Tie-dyed asked. There was a hint of insincerity in his voice. "It's this goomba I've been told to waste." He waved the gun toward the motionless man in the mirror sunglasses, drugged back at the landing, Murch guessed, which explained his coloring and his total relaxation. "He was too dumb to know it," Tie-dyed continued. "You land, I do him, you fly me to Minneapolis."

Murch's mind swam. This made little sense. Why would two mob hit men choose his plane in the middle of nowhere, Ontario, Canada? And these were two of the mob's best. He had been fairly certain before, and now there was no doubt. He had flown one of them from Colombia to Miami once, long ago when he was into things he shouldn't have been messing with, and the other had met them at the airport, but he doubted they would remember. His name was Ted Murchison then, his hair was a different color, his nose was shaped differently, he didn't have blue contacts for his eyes, and their boss wasn't in prison because of Murch's testimony about illegal drug dealing. It was before the witness protection program helped him relocate to this part of Ontario.

It had to be a trick to get him to take the plane down, Murch thought. But how did they plan to escape? The ice chest! When he weighed their luggage, the scale hit over four hundred pounds. Weights to take him to the bottom of a lake? A motor for an inflatable boat hidden in one of the duffels? It would only take them to shore; it wouldn't get them back the forty miles of uncharted territory to their car.

Murch decided to set the Comanche down. Defying Tie-dyed

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and flying back to Red Deer might force the gunman's hand. Circling a relatively large lake, he descended into the wind. A heavier chop was churning the water and could be seen clearly as they neared the surface. As the plane hit the water and lurched forward, Murch pulled the latch of his door open. If Tie-dyed's gun stayed pointed in his direction, he could jump out and take his chances in the water. Trimming back the engine, he aimed the plane for the middle of the lake, near a large wooded island with a sandy beach on the western side. If he was the target, he wasn't going to make it easy for Tie-dyed, who would find it difficult to navigate the plane back to the mainland.

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Mirror Sunglasses' back door open. He watched, dumbfounded, as Tie-dyed brutally pushed the gun into Mirror Sunglasses' left ear, pulled the trigger, and pushed the body out of the plane. Murch couldn't breathe. He couldn't move.

"Turn off the plane!" Tie-dyed yelled, waving the gun toward Murch.

Murch obeyed.

"Help me!" commanded Tie-dyed, opening the ice chest, revealing what Murch had suspected, chains and weights. Climbing out the door and standing on one of the pontoons, his pistol in his belt, Tie-dyed took the weights and chains that Murch handed him and wrapped them around Mirror Sunglasses' body, which was half floating, half hanging on the strut.

Murch kept scanning the area, desperately trying to come up with a plan. He was drawing a blank. If he tried for the island, even if Tie-dyed failed to hit him with a bullet, how long before search planes would come? What would happen then? He couldn't expose his friends to this maniac. He ran his tongue over his lips, dry in spite of the humidity.

Tie-dyed kicked the weights off the pontoon, and Mirror Sunglasses' body descended to the depths quickly.

"How deep is this lake?" Tie-dyed asked, pulling the gun from his belt.

Murch shrugged.

"Get back in the cockpit," Tie-dyed ordered while climbing into the passenger side front seat, refusing to fasten his seatbelt. "Now get us in the air. To Minneapolis!"

Alaska, Murch thought, his mind seeking an escape into fantasy. If he survived whatever Tie-dyed had in mind, he'd ask the Feds to set him up again in Alaska. He turned the

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engine over, the starter spinning the propeller until the motor chugged into life. Moving the plane to the east end of the lake, he opened the throttle. Reaching three thousand feet, he picked up the mike, but Tie-dyed waved no with his gun. Murch put the microphone back in its cradle.

"So it's Minneapolis," Murch asked.

"That's what I said," Tie-dyed snapped.

Several minutes later, Murch looked down. Black Stork Lake was off to his left. Another five minutes and he would be beyond where the loggers had worked this year or planned to work for the next three. He slowly climbed to five thousand feet Murch wondered about the ice chest. He didn't know why Mirror Sunglasses had to be killed, but he knew that he wouldn't have helped haul those chains and weights unless he thought he was wasting someone else. And that someone else had to be Ted Murchison. Wherever he landed the next time, Red Deer, International Falls, Minneapolis, anywhere, would be where he would die. This had all the markings of a twin killing. Two birds with one stone. String Mirror Sunglasses along, dispose of him, take care of the other target. How long would Tie-dyed keep up the charade, Murch wondered.

He wondered if Tie-dyed would notice the fuel gauge registered only a quarter full, insufficient fuel to reach Minneapolis. He also wondered if Tie-dyed would notice that they were heading farther north into Canada. But most of all he wondered whether Tie-dyed realized that the passenger side door didn't latch tight and that it would fly open if any weight was flung against it, and that's why he never let anyone sit there. He wondered a lot about that as he banked the Comanche hard to the right.

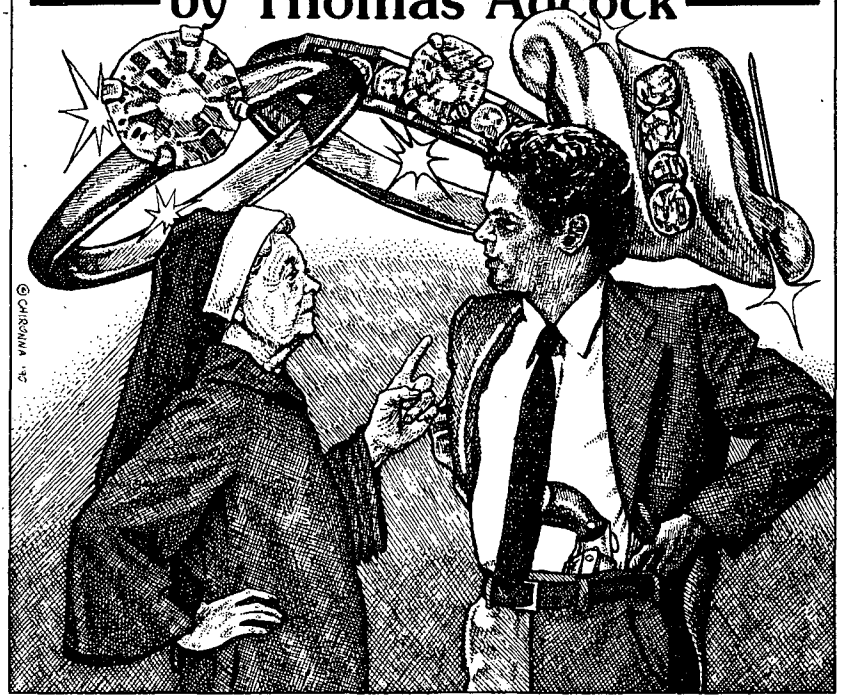
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FICTION

Straight Down the Middle

by Thomas Adcock



"It was a shame to train a brilliant boy like Fredo Suarez in auto shop," said Sister Nell Abbott, A.B., M.A., Ph.D. "Had we had a school like this a few years ago, I feel sure that Fredo would be alive today."

"You can't blame the school altogether, ma'am," said Larry Stein, M.P.D. "Most of these punk kids claim to be misunderstood geniuses."

The old nun's eyes glinted. "Fredo was not a punk, and he was a genius," she said. "The moment he discovered music, all his conflicts with society ended."

"I'm sorry, I don't claim to be

Illustration by Ron Chironna

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a sociologist, ma'am. I'm just trying to find the diamonds."

They were sitting in the principal's office, where an August sun blazed through windows that still bore the glazier's labels. The bookshelves were freshly painted, and the floor was stacked with the nun's books. In the adjoining room, a telephone man was running new wires, and down the hall, expert welders of stainless steel were closing the last seams in the glittering chemistry lab.

The letters after Sister Nell Abbott's name were trophies of a long teaching career, all of it in the Little Havana district of Miami. She was a tiny, energetic woman whose face, in the shadow of her cowl, was a lacy network of soft wrinkles. It was impossible to tell how old she was, but one thing was sure—the years had not slowed her nimble mind, or softened her firm opinions.

The letters after Larry Stein's name meant Miami Police Department. He was a detective on the robbery squad, and a very boyish-looking one, being of the scientific school of criminology. He was tall, wide-shouldered, with blue eyes and black hair. He had come to his job from the top of his class in a college back in Minnesota; in his way, he was probably as dedicated to his career as Sister Nell Abbott was to hers.

The nun was so wrapped up in her new school that it was hard to get her to talk about an old and hopelessly unsolved case. The cardinal himself had laid the cornerstone a year and a half ago. Next week, His Eminence would consecrate it, with a sermon in Spanish.

"Oh yes, the diamonds," the nun said absently. "Have you talked to Carmen Suarez, Fredo's sister?"

"No, but a lot of officers have," said Stein. "She doesn't know much. And anyway, you know how loyal Cubans are to their families."

"What's wrong with that?" the nun snapped.

"Nothing, ma'am, except that it makes our work harder. Don't misunderstand me. I don't suspect anyone. I don't even expect to find the diamonds, really. I just happened to finish a case—and they handed me this one. Every time a man on the squad gets caught up, they give him this old case just to keep him busy."

He smiled. He was trying to be tactful, having sensed a rather impatient hostility in the old nun. But it did not work. Sister Nell said, "Well, I imagine all this industry would sound very good to the taxpayers—but I'm afraid that to the people involved in the case, it's just another excuse to roust them around."

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Stein blinked. *Roust!* That was a term cops used—or cop-haters. There were plenty of cop-haters in this part of the city, as there were in every part of every city where poor people lived. But he had hardly expected to find one in a Catholic order.

"I give you my word, ma'am, I'm not giving anyone a roust here."

"Well, then, go see Carmen. She'll give you a completely different picture of this tragedy. Even," the nun added significantly, "if she is afflicted by this Cuban idiosyncrasy of being loyal to her family."

"All right," Stein sighed. "But would you mind going over it again yourself? We keep hoping you'll recall some trivial detail that would start us on a new track."

"Oh, very well. The sooner you find the rocks, the sooner you'll take the heat off these people."

Rocks! Heat! Detective Larry Stein was slightly shocked again.

Sister Nell Abbott leaned back, frowning.

"I can date it accurately," she said, "because it was the day our cornerstone was laid. I was here on the school grounds, talking to the construction foreman, when I saw Donny Esposito and Fredo drive up . . ."

Detective Stein kept notes, but there was little she could tell him that was not in the files—very thick files that had accumulated for eighteen long months. Donny Esposito, age twenty-eight and no good, had been out of prison a week. He was walking across the Sixth Street viaduct when he saw a car standing in the middle of the span with a flat tire. It was an expensive car, and in his pocket Donny had a gun. The temptation was too much for him.

He held up the old couple in the car, taking one hundred and fifteen dollars from the man. He hit the woman with the gun when she tried to signal a passing motorist. She fell down, blood flowing freely from her head. Donny took two rings from her hands and tore a brooch from her dress before running across the viaduct.

Then he stole a car from a parking lot and got away clean. It was an inspired daylight job, brilliantly executed. He had a right to feel elated; and he did.

But the woman died.

And within an hour, her husband had identified Donny Esposito from police mug shots. Soon, felony men were searching Little Havana for him. They met several witnesses who had seen him cruising the streets, looking for Fredo Suarez, age sixteen.

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"Fredo was very young when Donny caught that five-to-life armed robbery rap a few years back," Sister Nell said briskly. "To all boys that age, Donny was then a neighborhood hero, a sort of Robin Hood. Fredo had, of course, outgrown that. But Donny didn't know it. He thought Fredo would still be his admirer."

"And Donny needed admiration," Stein murmured. "The elation of the robbery was dying by then, he was just a scared rat."

"Of course, I had no idea there had been a robbery and a murder when I saw them," Sister Nell continued. "They went into the sheet metal shop across the street. I would say it was maybe ten minutes later when a police car drove into the schoolyard, passing Donny's car as though they were stone blind. I have never understood how two supposedly competent policemen could overlook a red hot car."

"Well, it wasn't on the hot list yet, ma'am. The owner didn't even know it was stolen until we told him."

"Oh. Well then, a plainclothesman got out of the police car and came over to the foreman and me. The instant he identified himself, I just knew he must be looking for Donny. Then—we heard two shots from inside the shop. I told the plainclothesman that Donny Esposito was in there, but to be careful of Fredo . . ."

Sister Nell added, with sorrow in her voice, "I didn't know, of course, that Fredo, poor boy, was dead. The two officers ran across the street. One covered the front door. The other ran behind the shop. We heard the firing there. Soon some other prowl cars arrived, then the ambulance. And that's about all I can tell you, young man."

The only thing new was to hear it told by a nun, in the cop-hater lingo. Donny Esposito had killed Fredo Suarez, and had then run straight into the arms of the detective covering the back door. They fired simultaneously. The detective died. And Donny lived, to stand trial for three slayings.

But still missing, after eighteen months, were two rings and a brooch—valued at thirty-two thousand dollars. Donny was a tough punk but a cheap one. He had turned pale when told the value of his loot. *"Dios, no es posible!"* he gasped.

Donny swore he had given the jewels to Fredo to hide when they stopped at the Suarez home. He thought Fredo had left them there. He was surprised as well as upset when, in the sheet metal shop, Fredo began talking about making him take them back. *"This stuff is hot!"* Fredo had said, according to

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Donny. *"You're not unloading it on me."*

That, Donny said, was when he lost his head and shot the kid. He had died last month in the lethal-gas chamber of the Florida State Penitentiary, still swearing that he had not seen the jewels since handing them to Fredo, in Fredo's home. Everything else he said checked out.

"There was one other witness," Detective Stein said to Sister Nell. "And that would be Hector Nicasso, the guy who runs the sheet metal shop."

"Now, you let him alone!" Sister Nell said sharply. "Hector has gone straight for years. Why abuse him, on the word of a self-confessed liar?"

"Donny Esposito confessed to murder, not to lying," Stein said patiently. "When you've been on this job awhile, ma'am, you can tell when a thief is leveling. I didn't talk to him, but others did."

"But Hector Nicasso is a hunchback, and he's half deaf and about half blind. Pick on someone your own size. What are you trying to do—ride him right back to the joint?"

There it was again, the cop-hater jargon. *Joint!* She had probably picked it up the same way a cop did, by close and frequent association with people who talked that way. There were tough characters in Little Havana. And Sister Nell had apparently learned as much as she had taught.

"If Hector's clean, he has nothing to worry about," Stein said, slipping into the same mode of speech. "Sorry I had to bother you, ma'am, when you're so busy with your new school and all. Thank you very much."

He stood up. The nun stood up, too. She came around her new desk and escorted him to the front door. There she stopped and looked up at him, like a veteran principal dealing with a well-meaning but rather stupid schoolboy.

"Find your jewels," she said, "but there must be some better way to do it than to go on bullying the same innocent people. I thought detectives were supposed to be so smart."

"Not necessarily, ma'am. Most of us are pretty dumb."

She almost smiled. "I don't believe that. You just act dumb. Young man, let an old woman give you a word of advice: you've been going at this all wrong. Everything you do is based upon evil—the word of Donny Esposito—and nothing but evil can ever come from evil."

"If Donny lied, then everything I've been taught as a policeman is wrong, ma'am."

"That is quite possible," Sis-

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ter Nell said serenely. "Now you must stop believing evil and begin anew. Then see if you feel like pushing any more Cubans around."

"I'm not pushing anybody around, ma'am. I'm trying to go straight down the middle on this case. First, I'll have to talk to Hector Nicasso."

She shook a finger at him. "I suppose so, but see that you don't bully him."

He watched her go back down the hall—a tiny, bustling, busy figure; an old woman with many things on her mind. She stopped to flick a speck of dirt from one of her lovely new walls. She shook her head, more in sadness than in anger. She turned a corner, and was gone.

Detective Larry Stein shook his head as well, crossed the ungraded schoolyard and then the street—to the sheet metal shop where Fredo Suarez had been murdered.

Hector Nicasso had learned his craft in prison. So far as the police knew, he had indeed gone straight since then. But ex-convicts did frequent his shop, and his story that he was only helping them get "squared around" might or might not be true.

It was a small shop, and stiflingly hot. Hector had been injured at birth, leaving him dwarfishly deformed, hard of hearing, and almost blind. He snatched off one pair of thick glasses and put on a still thicker pair to study Detective Stein's police identification card. He wiped the sweat from his swarthy face. Then he cupped one hand behind his ear and again changed glasses, to bring Stein's face back into focus.

"A cop," he said flatly. "The jewels again—no?"

"The jewels again, yes," Stein shouted into the hand cupped at Hector's ear.

"Boy, you guys never take your thumb off," Hector said. "You know, cop, any time you want to take your business somewhere else, it's going to be all right by me. Well, here's how it was . . ."

His story had not changed since the last time, or the time before that. He had liked Fredo Suarez. He swore Fredo was a good kid. The only reason Fredo had brought Donny to the shop was that he was scared stiff. He wanted Hector to help him get rid of Donny.

"Donny said they were dime-store jewels he had pinched, but Fredo had a hunch," Hector told Detective Stein. "But he don't know how to shake Donny, see? He knows I'm stir-smart, and if I ain't, who is?"

Hector smiled. It was an oddly warm and attractive smile for such an unsightly man. Stein liked the smile. Stein said, "Well, I guess a guy as mean

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and rat-scared as Donny was that day would be hard to shake. Go on."

Hector continued, "I'm working on a job when they come in. With a slob like Donny Esposito, there's a time to chime off to him and a time to clam up—you know what I mean, cop?"

"I get it," Stein said.

"I was going to wait until I could say, Donny, cut loose from this punk kid; this is the kind of kid that loses his moxie and flakes out. Well, this is what I was going to say, to help Fredo get rid of him.

"But just then, Donny sees this car stop across the way. Nobody has to wise him up, who it is. Donny can make a cop around a corner in the pitch dark. Also he knows the sister—Sister Nell over to the school there—has got no time for him. Oh, man, that Sister Nell—she was always ratting him out to the priest back when Donny was in school." Hector Nicasso sighed. "Donny Esposito and me—what a pair! And we had one tough priest then. He would wallop the hell out of you for stealing."

"So the two of you were in the school together."

"Oh yeah."

Stein nodded. "Okay. Go on."

"I didn't see Donny's gun because I'm wearing my glasses for close work and I'm blind as a bat two feet off. I didn't hear them arguing—not the words, I mean; just a noise. But even a deaf man can hear a gun go off. He goes bing-bang, twice. He runs out the door. And there is this poor kid Fredo, deader than hell."

"You didn't see the jewels at all?"

"How would I see jewels? I can't see a horse in my own bed with the wrong glasses on."

Stein thought it over. "Hector, you're a lousy witness, but we think you're telling the truth for once."

Nicasso crossed himself. "I can lie. I am human, as who is not? But this time, I swear I'm talking straight—God's witness."

Stein went out. It was only a few blocks to a small, old, but neatly kept house that had been repainted so many times that its crust of paint was almost as thick as the wood siding. A tall woman, dark-skinned and with a crown of white hair piled high on her head, answered his knock. Stein offered his identification card and detective's shield.

She glanced at it quickly and said, "Police?"

"Yes, ma'am. I'd like to see Miss Carmen Suarez."

"Carmen not here. I mother. Carmen no do nothing bad. You go away, *por favor.*"

"All right, ma'am," Stein said. "I just promised Sister Nell Ab-

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bott I'd talk to her, that's all. It's nothing to worry about."

The nun's name seemed to make a decided difference. "Oh! Carmen work now," her mother said. "You come back tonight, eight o'clock. You see her then, no?"

Stein agreed. He went downtown and spent the rest of the day on still less profitable leads. So far as he could determine, no crooked pawnbroker, no shady jeweler, no known fence in all Miami had handled the jewels. No snitch had ever heard of them floating around the streets for sale. It was the deadest of dead ends.

Stein returned at eight o'clock to the Suarez home. Carmen herself let him in. Every man who had interviewed the dead boy's sister had spoken well of her, and most of them had mentioned how drop-dead gorgeous she was. Stein had expected a pert, chesty, sexy little thing. What he saw confounded that expectation.

He saw a tall, dark woman of twenty-two years whose beauty was many things; pain, for one. Carmen Suarez still suffered from her brother's death, and it put shadows in her huge black eyes, and made her hold her head just a bit higher. Partly her beauty was serenity; the deep, unshakable kind that comes from sorrow. And partly, too, it was something warm and kind and indefinably Cuban, something felt rather than seen; and from the moment he felt it, nothing about Larry Stein's job would ever be the same to him again.

"Please come in," she said, with a smile. "Do you want to talk to Mother, too? She speaks more English than you might think, but it's painful to her tongue."

"No, don't bother her," Stein said. "I'm just here because I promised Sister Nell Abbott."

"I hope I can help you," Carmen said. They sat down in the small, neat parlor. "It would mean so much to Mother, to have you find the jewels."

"I'd like to get one thing straight," Stein said. "I don't suspect anyone, and regardless of what that nun says, I'm not trying to push people around—Cubans or anybody else."

Carmen laughed, a soft laugh that crinkled her eyes and took some of the pain away. "Oh, don't let Sister Nell upset you. Sister is from Minneapolis, of all places, but she's more Cuban than us Cubans. I think she has a complex about us. You know, of course, what the kids call her to tease her?"

"No, I don't."

"La Panchita."

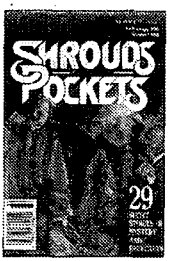
Stein said, "What does it mean?"

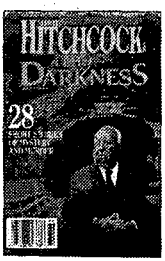
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"Little Pancha. It's a sort of baby love-name, from a *mariache* song—you know, for street musicians. It's a romantic song, very sad, sometimes very naughty, always very Cuban. All you had to do, to be kept in after school, was whistle *La Panchita* where Sister could hear you."

It was, to Larry Stein, somewhat disconcerting to learn that the nun came from his own home state of Minnesota. She was more Cuban than the Cubans, while he, a cop, remained a stranger in the community.

According to the files, Carmen Suarez's father had died when she was fourteen, Fredo twelve. The mother had worked in a poultry slaughterhouse, a nasty but well paid job, until Carmen was out of school and could assume the family's support. And now Carmen was chief statistician for an electronics firm; Stein had been surprised to learn from the files that she made more money than he did.

She was an intelligent young woman, and eager to help, but it was another dead end. She talked freely, but it was mostly about her dead brother. She seemed to want very much for Stein to understand the boy.

"He stole things. He carried a switchblade knife. He was a real punk, and it was his fault and ours and I'm not trying to excuse it. Such things are not really excusable, are they?" Carmen asked.

Stein hedged. "Well, under certain—"

"When he was about fourteen, he suddenly got interested in jazz music. He played clarinet. Then, overnight, he was a different person. Do you know anything about jazz?"

"Well, *I* got through two years of college by playing trumpet in a little band."

She studied him curiously. "And now you're a cop?"

"In music, just good isn't good enough. You've got to be very, very good to make a career of it. And I wasn't very, very good."

"I think Fredo was," Carmen said. "Sister made a tape of some tunes he composed. After Fredo was killed, she gave it to Mother. Would you like to hear it?"

"Yes," Stein said sincerely.

Carmen went out and came back with a cassette player. She slipped in Fredo's tape and the two of them listened; Carmen's eyes never left Stein's face.

The tape had been played many times and was scratchy, and the recording circumstances were not the best. The music itself was undisciplined. Like a teenage boy, it was always on the verge of being very bad—or very, very good.

Mostly, it was the latter. Mostly this was the strong,

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original music of a half-trained, reckless kid who did not know how good he was. How could he? He had been trained for life's work in an auto shop. Now he was dead.

The tape ended. Stein said, "If I could play like that, I wouldn't be a cop today."

Carmen's swift smile rewarded him. "And you know music! Oh, Mother will be so proud to know you said that."

He did not want to go yet. He stalled for time. "Would you mind playing it again?"

When he left the house, hours later, he still had no idea where the diamonds were, and he had probably fallen in love with Carmen Suarez. It was an odd love. He did not want to take her to shows, or buy her dinner and flowers, or kiss her—not yet, anyway. That could wait. Even thinking about it could wait.

All he felt was a mystical desire to serve her. In many ways, Larry Stein was just as boyish as he looked. He loved Carmen as he had loved his first sweetheart, in the fourth grade.

But he was a good policeman, trained to face his problem squarely. He went to his apartment downtown and sat in his shorts for a long time, facing his problem with tested police logic learned at the academy. And he could only conclude: something was wrong; someone had lied.

It came down to this—he could believe the cold logic of police science, or the warm loyalty of Sister Nell Abbott and Hector Nicasso and Carmen Suarez. But not both. Both sides in this case, where everything had gone stale but the bitterness, could not be right.

Stein did not sleep well that night. It was humid and hot. The beat of a dead boy's wild music was in his bones; he kept seeing the painfully beautiful face of Carmen Suarez.

He left his apartment house early in the morning. He headed toward the Police Headquarters building, intending to have breakfast somewhere along the way. Then it came to him.

Being of the scientific school of criminology, Larry Stein knew all about the subconscious mind. And how it works in sleep. He was pretty sure that all through the hot, humid night's sleep he had never left his problem for a moment.

He stopped walking and simply stood at a corner, marveling at how simple it was. All the detectives who had ever worked the case had made the same mistake.

Both sides, after all, *could* be right! The men who believed Donny Esposito were right to believe him. But so were Sister

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Nell and Hector Nicasso and Carmen; they were right to believe as they did.

How this could be, Stein did not yet understand. But with this straight in his head, he saw that he had an entirely new problem. He could stop worrying about the hearts of people, which neither logic nor loyalty could ever know conclusively, and start thinking in terms of *things*. Things had no motives, no feelings. Things were merely things.

Things could be jewels, for instance. Stein picked out the file from the briefcase he carried. It was thick, but he knew his way through it. He licked his thumb and riffled the pages quickly.

He was not halfway through it when it came to him where the jewels were. It was crazy, grotesque, improbable—but it was the only place the things could be, if both sides in this old, bitter case were indeed right.

He threw the file back in his briefcase and started walking again, only back toward his apartment house—and his car, in the basement garage. Then he drove down to Little Havana. It was not yet eight A.M. when he stopped in front of Hector Nicasso's sheet metal shop, but the door was open. And from the interior of the shop came the rhythmic thump of Hector's electric punch press.

Stein went in. He approached warily, not wishing to startle the hunchback at his machine. Hector, however, had a sixth sense about cops. He snapped the switch of the punch press, snatched off one pair of glasses, put the other pair on, and whirled to face Detective Stein like he was a cornered fox. "Oh, you again—no?" was all he said.

Stein leaned over to shout into his ear. "Me again, yes. Look, pal, you can help me."

"Oh yeah?"

"Listen, we keep track of the jewels all the way from the robbery to the Suarez home. That's where Donny Esposito says he gave them to Fredo—right? But we know they're not in that house, because Donny said Fredo still had them when the two of them came here. Besides which, we tore that house apart and couldn't find the diamonds."

Hector shrugged. "Go on," he muttered. "Go on."

"There's a chance that Fredo threw them out between his house and your shop. But Donny says he still had them when they were here."

"I did not see them," Hector said quickly.

"I believe you. But I think Donny did see them. They couldn't possibly have left here— yet we've turned your shop upside down and inside

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out without finding any trace of the diamonds."

Hector was tense and suspicious. "Go on," he said.

"Hector, you know what I think? All this kid wanted was to get rid of those hot rocks. I think he threw them down on your workbench, and then they got mixed up in your job. I think we'll find the diamonds in somebody's rear bumper or front fender—whatever you were working on then, eighteen months ago. They're just *things,* Hector. They didn't get up and walk out. They went out of here in a thing of some kind."

Hector's face whitened. He crossed himself.

"Mother of God—I was sealing the time capsule for the cornerstone of the new school!" he burst out. "You know—a copper box with the things people put under cornerstones. The daily paper. A letter from the mayor. A rosary blessed by the pope. The key to the old school building. You can't solder it shut until the last day, because you have to have the daily paper."

They stared at each other. "Hector," Stein said, "do you know how to reach the sister by phone?"

Again, Hector crossed himself. "Don't call her! The cardinal himself set the stone, blessed it, spread the mortar. Sister would kill us for such sacrilege."

"It's not sacrilege. We're trying to clear a dead boy's name, Hector. We've got to tear that stone out."

Hector shuddered. "I will give you the tools, but you must do it. You're a cop. Maybe your soul is in better shape to carry this sin than mine."

Don't bet on it, Stein thought. He said, "Let's go."

Hector filled a gunny sack with tools, and Stein carried them across the street, to the corner of the new school. He took off his coat and rolled up his sleeves.

It was rich, strong mortar, and the cardinal had been lavish with it. It was an hour before Stein could insert a bar and pry out the big cube of carved granite. He knelt and attacked the mortar in the bottom of the cavity with a small chisel, working slowly and carefully.

In ten more minutes, he lifted it out—a copper casket about the size of a shoebox. He did not try to break Hector's sturdy soldering job. With a knife, he carefully cut a large hole in the soft copper lid.

"Say, what's going on here?" said a sharp voice behind him.

Stein stood up. Sister Nell Abbott had come out of the front door of her new school and was bustling toward them, black robes flying. He had never seen such outraged anger on a human face, and he knew better

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than to try to explain it to her. Either he was right or he was not, and if he was not, words would be no help.

He turned the box upside down over his hand and shook it. He held the hand out. Sister Nell looked. She shrank back.

There, among the holy things on Stein's hand, lay three pieces of stolen jewelry. They had cost thirty-two thousand dollars retail, and also four lives.

"I told you I was trying to go straight down the middle to find them," Stein said. "They got mixed up in these things when Hector sealed the box."

What Sister Nell said rather surprised Stein, at first. On second thought, it was just what he should have expected of the nun all the Cuban kids called *La Panchita.*

"Oh, I'm so glad Donny Esposito did not go to meet his God with a lie on his soul!" Sister Nell cried.

"So am I, ma'am."

The nun looked ruefully down at the wreckage of her cornerstone. Then back up at Stein. "Now, this must all be done over again, after the cardinal himself set it!" she said.

"I can put it back," Stein said. "I don't know much about these things, but I don't think this would disturb the blessing, would it? I mean—"

"No, wait. You must be the one to do it, because you have done us all a very great service. But wait until our consecration, and do it then. You must be a guest of honor. I know the cardinal would want to meet the young man who has done this thing for us."

Stein's first thought was that Carmen Suarez would be there, and because he had found the jewels and restored her brother Fredo's honest name she would look as he saw her that one brief moment when she laughed — when some of the pain had been erased from her face.

"I'd like to, ma'am," Stein said. "But I ought to let you know that I'm not a Catholic."

"Oh, that's all right," Sister Nell said airily. "The cardinal goes straight down the middle, too."

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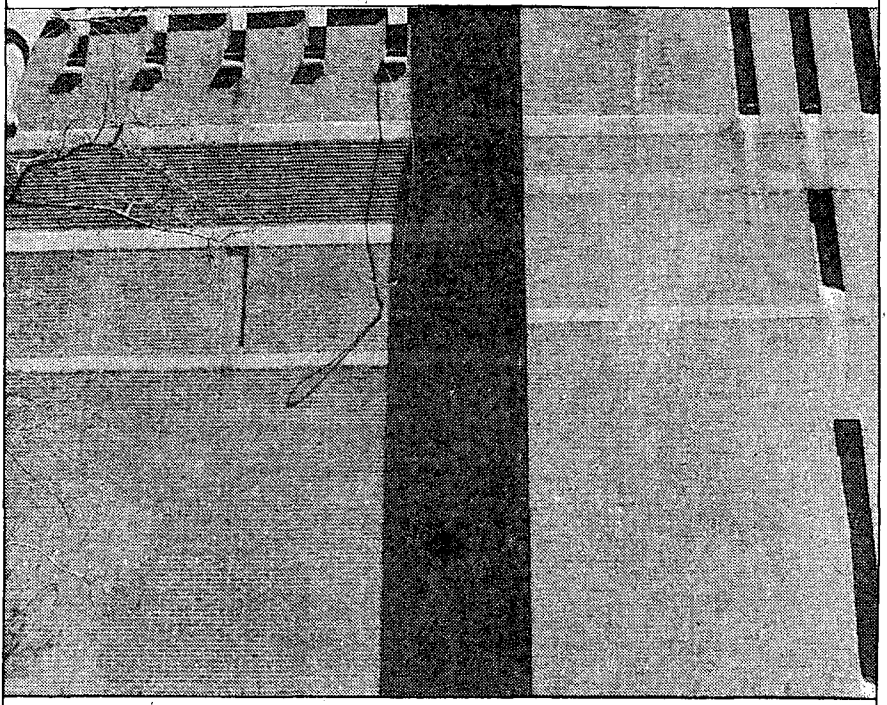
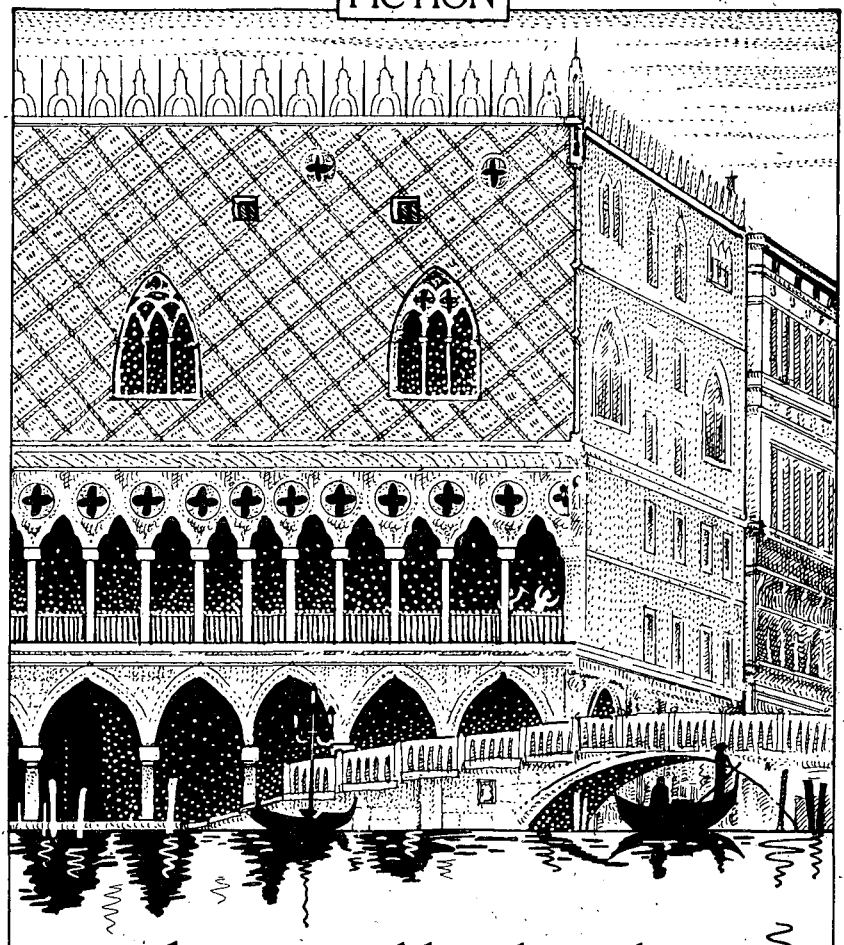


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The winning entry for the February Mysterious Photograph will be found on page 155.

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Who Killed That Son of a Doge?

by David Braly

Illustration by Glenn Wolff

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"Follow me, signor," said the servant.

Adrian della Cle wondered why the old man sounded hostile. Perhaps because that was what his profession required. More likely, though, it was because Adrian was a Florentine and right now no Florentine was popular in Venice, especially an agent of the Vossi banking family.

The servant led him through a heavy, richly-carved door, then up wide marble stairs to the palazzo's second floor. Its hall was unusually wide, its walls lined by paintings. Excellent paintings for a Venetian house. He followed the old man to another heavy, elaborately-carved door, which the servant opened for him. Adrian entered. The servant followed him in, to chaperone the conversation between his mistress and the Vossi agent.

Giovanna del Noppo was seated at a small desk. Behind her was a large glassless window, the green of trees fast by and a few leaves even overflowing into the room itself. The room was obviously for work, and yet it wasn't the typical office Adrian was accustomed to. It was feminine. There were no cabinets crammed with papers, no standing desks, no pornographic paintings, no weapons standing in the corner. It had only the small desk, a robin's egg blue bench, an elaborately carved table surrounded by chairs, one cabinet and that both small and decorative, and a huge, silk-covered trunk. The walls were white, their paintings small.

Giovanna surprised Adrian. For some reason he'd thought of her as a heavy matron in late middle age. Maybe because Flaminio di Sippa was middle-aged and Di Sippa had been engaged to Giovanna's daughter. But of course a man would prefer a young bride, and the bride's widowed mother need not have been either old or fat.

She was probably in her forties, but looked younger. Blue-eyed, chestnut-haired, she had cream-colored skin and the reddest lips Adrian had ever seen on an aristocrat. As red as a ripe apple. She had the high cheekbones that Adrian always found attractive, as well as a long neck and large breasts. Dressed in an amber dress with a glittering necklace and long white gloves, Giovanna looked as though she might be ready to go to a party or other social event. Beauty, wealth, and a widow besides. Adrian thought that she would be perfect to marry, if only she weren't a Venetian. There was always some problem like that to frustrate his plans for the good life.

"Greetings from my master, Leon Vossi," said Adrian, bow-

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ing. "I am Adrian della Cle, a man of the Vossi firm."

"Welcome to Venice, Signor Della Cle." Her voice was beautiful. "What errand has Leon Vossi sent you on? I would think that Venice is the last place he would wish to send one of his men today. I would also think that this palazzo would be one of the last places in Venice he would send one of his men."

"Leon Vossi sends his assurance that neither his family nor his firm were concerned with the murder of Flaminio di Sippa. War would be to the detriment of both our economies. Vossi says that this doge is neither better nor worse than his predecessors, thus there would be no reason for the Vossis to murder his son. The son by himself was of no consequence."

Birds flew into the tree outside the window. Their singing was loud.

"The Noppos have sold gold to the Vossis whenever the political situation permitted it," said Giovanna. "I know Leon Vossi to be honest for a Florentine, although I also know that he is ruthless and that he is under mounting pressure from the Asinno family and their partisans. Being a woman, I've never dealt with him personally, of course, but I have received reports from the Noppo firm's business managers."

"The reports are accurate. Without doubt you've also heard that Vossi is an intelligent man. He would never order an assassination without some purpose. No reason existed for the Vossis to kill the doge's son."

Giovanna stared down at the desktop, as though considering this information. As attractive as her blue eyes made her, Adrian thought she looked even more attractive with her eyes lowered. If only that chaperone weren't standing behind him and if only she weren't a Venetian and if only she weren't an aristocrat and—ah, what was the use of thinking about it? He did wonder what the daughter looked like when the mother was so beautiful.

She looked up and smiled. She still had half her teeth! Adrian's heart pulsated violently.

"Why did Leon Vossi send you here?" she asked. "And exactly what is your job?"

"He sent me to you in the hope that you can answer questions that will lead to a discovery of the real assassin of Flaminio di Sippa. As for myself, I am employed by the Vossis to solve mysteries which involve their firm or their family. Usually crimes, signora."

"You must be clever." Her eyes ran down the length of his body, then up again. Adrian realized that she was appraising

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his bed potential and guessed that the chaperone was directly behind him where he couldn't see her eyes. "But why come to me?" she asked.

"Three reasons, signora. First, the long relationship that has existed between the Vossis and the Noppos. Second, you were at the scene when the murder occurred and might be able to give more details than our Venetian correspondent. Third, we could hardly ask the doge or the collegio for help."

"Hardly at the scene of the crime," objected Giovanna. "I was in the palace, but Flaminio di Sippa was murdered in the hall and I was in one of the rooms. Both of us were in the doge's private quarters, and both of us at the southeast corner on the second floor, true, but I knew nothing about the killing until the doge's guards rushed in while looking for the murderer. Di Sippa was stabbed in the heart with a dagger. He fell halfway down the stairs. A Circassian house slave spotted his body lying against the balusters, yelled for help, and the doge's guards responded. Flaminio di Sippa was already dead. A search of the southeast corner revealed only Ciriaco da Tiena; my daughter, who was Flaminio's fiancée; and of course myself. We were all above suspicion. A thorough search of the entire palace failed to turn up anyone, although a number of the servants were examined under torture."

"This Ciriaco da Tiena," said Adrian. "Is he a friend of the doge?"

"He's a member of the Great Council—and a rival of the doge." Giovanna smiled again, this time without parting her lips. There was something condescending about the smile. "I know what you're thinking, but you're thinking like a Florentine."

"How's that, signora?"

"Florence is a place of intense party rivalries, of riots in the streets, of political assassinations. The reason the doge suspects the Vossis of killing his son is that our peace with Florence exists because of the Asinnos and the doge himself. That, combined with the vital clue that the dagger was clearly of Florentine manufacture, implicated the Vossis to him and other citizens. If the doge's son died by a Florentine's hand—even if it be an enemy of that family who had established the peace—peace between Venice and Florence would have been jeopardized. A Venetian political assassination is out of the question. That sort of behavior doesn't exist here. There are no partisan riots, certainly no assassinations. If Ciriaco da Tiena murdered Flaminio, it wasn't for political reasons."

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"Could there have been other reasons?" asked Adrian.

"They had a business dispute of some sort. I don't know the details."

"And—please forgive me for asking, signora, but it is my duty in order to serve my master properly—did you have a reason to dislike Flaminio di Sippa?"

Giovanna looked down at the gloved hands resting on the desktop. Adrian feared that she would order him to leave immediately, possibly even notify the authorities of his presence in Venice. But when she looked up at him again, her eyes appeared friendly. Adrian felt relief. Angering beautiful women was something he always tried to avoid. On principle. Well, for reasons he felt as strongly about as he did about principles.

"It's no secret that I learned of his plan to elope with my daughter. She's old for marriage—nineteen—but the Noppos have been saving her for a really good alliance because she is the most beautiful woman in the Venetian Republic. Doges come and go. Flaminio wasn't the man our family sought for her. We thought perhaps the Duke of Milan's son. When we learned of her plan, I suggested that she be locked up. Others in the family believed we could not insult the Sippas in such a manner, especially since they have been friends of the Noppos for hundreds of years. What could I do?"

Giovanna didn't elaborate on the problem because she knew Adrian understood it. The Noppos were one of two hundred patrician families who formed the Great Council that ruled Venice. A family of great power, but allied to the other patrician families. Leon Vossi had told Adrian that Giovanna was the actual leader of the Noppo family, that while she remained in the background she made the policy decisions and some of the day-to-day decisions as well. But as a woman she could never be a citizen and could never overrule a decision the Noppo men made in opposition to her, even if it involved her own daughter's marriage.

"A formal engagement was agreed to instead of an elopement," continued Giovanna. "They would've been married this week."

"But you still opposed it because she could've done better than the doge's son?"

"That and another reason."

"Another reason?"

Giovanna sighed. "You'll hear it eventually anyway, so I suppose I should tell you myself. Earlier he had bedded another woman. Several other women over the course of the years, but one in particular after his wife's death. Me."

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At first Adrian didn't know what to say. He had arrived in Venice expecting to unravel political or business intrigues that led to murder, but the case had taken a turn he'd never anticipated.

"Were you—were you jealous?"

Giovanna shook her head. "I simply believed she would be better off with another man. My desire to be in Flaminio's embrace ended months ago."

Only months, thought Adrian. Not years; months.

"Would you object to my questioning your daughter?" asked Adrian.

"Yes. No. I don't know. I guess it won't hurt her more than she's already hurt. Go ahead."

"Thank you, signora. I will pay my respects to you again before I leave the palazzo."

Giovanna's blue eyes cruised down his body and back up again. Adrian could feel her mentally caressing him. He hoped that she would arrange to meet him without the chaperone, that something nice would happen. She sighed, looked down at her gloved hands resting on the desktop again.

"Thank you for your courtesy, Signor Della Cle," she said. "I can see that Leon Vossi still employs only the best servants money can buy. However, I will be busy later."

Adrian was confused. She clearly wanted him, clearly had the power to do anything she wanted inside her house, and yet she wouldn't see him again. Or maybe she really didn't want him, maybe a woman of her beauty and prestige could do better for herself than spend time with a twenty-nine-year-old Florentine hireling.

Then he remembered his original impression of her attire, that she was dressed to go to a party or other social function. Adrian felt tremendous relief. He'd feared for a whole second that maybe he wasn't desirable to her.

"As you wish, signora," he said, and bowed deeply.

Again the servant stood behind Adrian to chaperone the female. This time he hadn't led Adrian to a second floor room, but to a library on the first floor. The library was smaller than the one at Palazzo Vossi, yet probably contained fifty books in Latin and Greek as well as pamphlets and paintings. Sunlight that entered the glassed windows and reflected off the tall candle lamps played upon the walls and the paintings. Adrian had waited here, pacing the floor in anticipation of meeting the most beautiful woman in the Venetian Republic, until the servant returned

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with Vittoria del Noppo. When they arrived, the young woman walked to a blue and brown cloth-covered bench, where she seated herself. She stared at Adrian without interest.

Adrian tried to avoid staring at her, although that was difficult. She had the same cream complexion, brown hair, and blue eyes as her mother. Her lips were also apple red. Moreover, she was young, fresh, looked innocent. What she lacked was the high cheekbones that enhanced her mother's beauty, and while her neck was attractively long, her breasts were small. Of the two women, Adrian believed the mother was the better looking, but both truly were astonishing beauties. It hurt Adrian just to look at them. Looking at Vittoria now, the same words went through his mind again that had gone through it when he looked at Giovanna: *if only she weren't a Venetian!*

"Signorina, I am Adrian della Cle. I am seeking to discover who murdered Signor Di Sippa."

"The Vossis," she said without hesitation. "Everyone knows it was the Vossis, Signor Della Cle, so why must you come here and pretend otherwise? I know who you are. You serve the Vossis. Maybe it was you that entered the Doge's Palace and assassinated my Flaminio. Maybe I should send a messenger to the doge to inform him of your presence."

"Is it logical to believe, signorina, that a Vossi agent would risk his life on the brigand-infested roads between Florence and Venice to seek proof of guilt if he knew that such guilt rested with his own masters? Leon Vossi himself has told me that the Vossi family and bank are innocent of the murder of Di Sippa. I believe him."

"I don't. But I was told to cooperate. I'm here."

Her tone signaled to Adrian her bitterness and resentment towards him. It agonized him. He wished that there was some way to turn this girl into a friend. The only way was to reveal the murderer's true identity.

"I understand," began Adrian, "that you originally planned to elope with Di Sippa, then decided upon a formal engagement and wedding. Why?"

"We originally planned to elope because we knew that Mother would never approve of our getting married. She used to be Flaminio's friend. Then, a few months ago, she suddenly refused to see him again, although there didn't appear to be animosity directed toward Flaminio. We had become acquainted while Mother was seeing him, and when she stopped he began to pay atten-

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tion to me. Eventually he asked me to elope with him. I said yes. Mother found out, locked me up, told me that the family would have the marriage annulled if I did succeed in marrying him, but my uncles said that it would be wrong to anger the Di Sippas and that I could marry him. Flaminio was delighted. He told me that this made everything better because now he could obtain a large dowry. His father was also pleased, both by the prospect of a large dowry and by having me in their family. We would have been married this week if a Vossi agent wielding a Florentine dagger hadn't taken him from me."

A bell clanged in the distance.

Adrian waited until it stopped, then asked: "Were you present when Di Sippa was killed?"

She nodded.

"Where in the palace?"

"The southeast corner of the second floor. Mother and I had gone there to dine with the doge, the only formal meal we all would take together before the marriage. A room on the second floor was put at our disposal until the dinner. I was in the room."

"And your mother? Was she there the whole time that you were?"

"No, she—" Vittoria suddenly understood the direction of the questioning; she looked up at Adrian in anger. "How dare you!" she said. "Mother had nothing to do with Flaminio's death and neither did I."

"You said she wasn't in the room."

"She was gone briefly."

"And you? Were you in the room alone?"

"Yes. I had no reason to dislike him, imbecile. He's the only man I ever loved or ever shall love."

Adrian wanted to assure her that this was false, but that was none of his business. He said nothing. He wanted to say something to comfort her but believed that such action on his part would be resented.

"You mentioned a dowry," resumed Adrian. "What would it have been?"

"That question was still being negotiated by agents of my mother and the doge. Because the wedding was so near, settling the matter had become a crisis. But of course sometimes these matters are negotiated until a few days before the wedding, each side holding out for the best deal. My mother—or rather the Noppos, although actually my mother—were offering five hundred yellow ducats. The doge and Flaminio said that this offer was insulting to me and to them."

"How did you feel about it?"

"I didn't care one way or the

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other, Signor Della Cle. All I cared about was Flaminio."

Adrian didn't know much about the Venetian monetary system, but he did know that a skilled craftsman could earn a gold ducat every week. Fifty a year. That meant the dowry Giovanna had offered her future son-in-law was only ten times what a skilled craftsman would make in a year. For a family as rich and powerful as the Noppos, this was small pay indeed, and truly an affront to both the Di Sippas and to Vittoria herself.

"Is the firm of Noppo in financial trouble?" asked Adrian.

Adrian heard the servant suppress a laugh behind him.

"Financial trouble?" asked Vittoria. "How would I know?"

Adrian realized that he had attributed the mother's character to the daughter as well as her looks. But why had the servant almost burst out laughing? Because the idea of the Noppos being in financial trouble was funny? Or simply because Adrian had asked a girl?

Adrian knew that the Noppo firm imported gold bullion from Hungary and the Sudan. They then exported the bullion to other European states, although there had been rumors for a century that they also did business with the Turks. The Noppo company leased galleys from the arsenal for much of this trade. Moreover, the Noppos didn't bother to have their bullion worked into coins, jewelry, or other articles the way many Venetians did, limiting their trade to bullion alone. All of which told Adrian that the Noppo firm was large and powerful; none of it told him if it was profitable.

Two scenarios developed in Adrian's mind. One, that Vittoria was lying when she expressed lack of concern about her dowry, and herself killed Di Sippa because she resented his demands for a big dowry. The second, that the firm of Noppo was in financial trouble, that the demand for a big dowry would reveal this if they continued, and therefore Giovanna murdered Di Sippa to hide the firm's plight.

Adrian asked more questions of Vittoria, mostly about her relationship with Flaminio di Sippa rather than details of the murder day. He never directly asked her if she'd slept with Di Sippa, but he was trying to discover that by asking other questions that were indirect. Vittoria was slow to realize his game. Once she did, she proved herself braver than Adrian over this question.

"I see where you are trying to lead me," she snapped. "The answer you seek is yes. Twice." Vittoria sniffed rapidly and her

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chin trembled. She was trying hard not to cry.

"May I go now?" she asked. "I really feel sick."

"Of course you may, signorina. And please forgive my having to ask these questions. We really seek the same end, you and I."

Vittoria rose and hurried out of the room without glancing at him.

Adrian hired a boat to take him from the Palazzo Noppo down the Canale Grande and Rio di Baccarie to the mansion of Ciriaco da Tiena. The boatman spoke not a word to Adrian the whole trip. No matter. Venice already had too much noise.

The Da Tiena mansion was large, but not huge the way Palazzo Noppo was huge. It hugged the Rio di Baccarie. A tall, thin building of yellow stone, it looked centuries old. Possibly it was that old. The Da Tienas weren't some upstart family; they were another of the patrician families that ruled the Venetian Republic, which in turn ruled an empire on both sides of the Adriatic. Once inside, Adrian discovered that the house was tastefully decorated, but dark. Short, narrow windows permitted little sunlight to enter.

Ciriaco da Tiena received Adrian in a small room on the first floor. Da Tiena was seated in a large chair beside a table. A couple of standing desks, four cabinets for papers, and the look of the room's clutter all indicated that this was an office, although one singularly dark and severe. Da Tiena, a tall, lean black-haired man dressed in brown, greeted Adrian without enthusiasm.

"I'm surprised," said Da Tiena, "that the Vossis would send an agent to Venice at such a time as this. The Vossis are hated here."

"Without justification, sir," said Adrian.

"That I don't pretend to know about. All that's really known is that Flaminio was slain with a Florentine dagger and that the Vossis oppose the friendly relations the doge has established with Florence."

"Not with Florence; with the Asinno family and their partisans. Since the Asinnos are enemies of the Vossis, naturally the Vossis will oppose whatever they do. For all that, though, they did not assassinate the doge's son. No reason existed to do it."

"Perhaps. Frankly, I've had doubts about its being the work of outsiders. Flaminio had enemies here. I was one. There were others. And a Florentine dagger isn't that hard to come by."

Adrian was pleased to hear

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that at least one person other than Giovanna de Noppo was willing to concede that the murder might have been committed by a Venetian.

"I understand," said Adrian, "that you and Flaminio di Sippa were in business together."

A look of astonishment crossed Da Tiena's face. "Never," he said. "Nor would I ever have gone into business with that unprincipled man. I did have business dealings with him until recently, and perhaps that is what your informant refers to."

Adrian realized that Da Tiena was right, that Giovanna had only said that the two men had had a business dispute, not that they were in business together. Adrian had assumed the latter.

"May I ask if you had trouble in your business dealings with him?" said Adrian. "I need to understand more about Di Sippa himself, and this information would tell me something about him."

Da Tiena laughed. "I'm sure! It would tell you that Flaminio di Sippa was a thief."

Da Tiena reached over to the table, grabbed something out of a small bowl, took part in one hand and part in the other, and tossed one part to Adrian. Adrian caught it. It was a nut. Da Tiena cracked the nut he'd kept on the table, opened it up, and ate it. Adrian walked to one of the standing desks, cracked his nut, and began eating the core, dropping the shell onto the floor.

"There's a chair over there if you wish to sit down," said Da Tiena.

"Uh, no, sir, but thank you."

The informality of the man astonished Adrian. Such treatment from someone like Da Tiena wouldn't surprise him in Florence, but in Venice he had no vote.

Da Tiena stared down at the floor while he repeatedly stroked his short, black beard. "Flaminio di Sippa," he said, "was a man I wish I'd never done business with."

Da Tiena paused, thought for a long time, then looked up at Adrian and continued:

"He's always cheated me. Ever since our second venture together. Petty stuff. I continued to do business with the man because of just how petty it was; that is to say, I never lost much money because of him. At least not until this last venture."

"When was this last one?" asked Adrian.

"I learned of the cheat only a week before Flaminio's murder. My family's firm—which you may know is one of Europe's leading glass producers—had almost a full shipload of glass to send to . . . well, it's not important where our customer is located. Suffice it to say, we had almost a shipload

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of glass. The Di Sippa firm produces scented soaps. When Flaminio learned that we had rented a galley from the arsenal to ship this glass, he came to me and asked if we had enough room to carry some soap to the same country. We did. So I struck a bargain with Flaminio. He would include his soap with our glass shipment, my crew would handle the loading and unloading as well as the carrying, and my captain would transport his shipment with ours. The soap came aboard in crates, which Flaminio said was necessary to protect it from sea water. Our firm was to receive two silver groats for each crate. There were eight crates. Not much, you see. But we had the extra room and it helped a fellow Venetian—a son of the doge, no less—so we did it. We delivered the crates, collected the money for them, and turned the full amount over to Flaminio, who thereupon paid us sixteen groats."

"What was the problem?"

"A week before Flaminio's murder I received a letter from our customer. He informed us that the eight crates which should've contained scented soap contained only blocks of wood. Flaminio's customer was making demands upon him—*our* customer—for repayment of the money Flaminio had cheated him out of. And why not? If you look at it from the victim's point of view, we're both Venetians and from our delivering Flaminio's wares, in business together. I ordered that the full cost of the soap be forwarded to our customer, but I fear we've lost him anyway."

"Did you make demand upon Flaminio for compensation?"

"Yes. He denied everything. But I knew Flaminio well enough to know when he was lying. He was lying."

"Is the customer an important one?"

"All customers are important. But yes, more than most others, this customer is important."

Adrian was surprised at Da Tiena's candor. Surely the man realized that the information implicated himself. So what was Ciriaco da Tiena up to?

"He'd changed recently," continued Da Tiena. "Of course, as I said, he was always a thief to some extent."

"Changed how?"

"It's hard to explain. The changes were so gradual that I didn't think about them at the time, only in retrospect. Flaminio during the last few months became more reckless, more ruthless, more odd. His business transactions became less honest. That wasn't only my experience; it was also the experience of other merchants who had the misfortune to en-

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ter into ventures with him. In his personal affairs, he changed. Signora Giovanna del Noppo had been his special friend for years; then, for some reason, she stopped seeing him a few months ago, shortly after she fell sick with a fever. He began seeing her daughter instead. Almost eloped with her, but a formal engagement was eventually announced. His habits changed, too. He began to rise early and go to bed late, which was just the opposite of his previous habit. He took greater care with his personal appearance, perhaps because he was seeing such a beautiful girl. He began wearing gloves, where before he seldom wore them, and donned fancy hats and superbly crafted boots. And he began acting strange, laughing too readily and getting angry too easily."

"What happened the day of the murder?" said Adrian.

"We'd just sent off payment to our customer so that he could repay Flaminio's customer. I was angry. I had a boatman take me to the Doge's Palace, where I intended to confront Flaminio again and, if I failed to get satisfaction from him, inform his father. His father would've done nothing, but at least it would have given me some satisfaction."

"How?"

"Because Aeneas di Sippa would have the awful knowledge that I, Ciriaco da Tiena, looked down upon his eldest son with contempt. Not with hatred. Contempt. That would bother him much . . . Aeneas and I aren't friends, you see. In our case the trouble is political rather than financial. I've never had any problems doing business with Aeneas."

Adrian thought it odd that a man who disliked the doge's politics enough to hurt him had no hesitation doing business with him. But was it really so strange? Adrian himself worked for the Vossis, one of the most powerful families in Florence's aristocratic party, although he was in fact a democrat who politically supported the Vossis' nemesis, the Asinnos. Adrian had little trouble with this dichotomy of interest between the political and the financial. Neither, to his knowledge, did the Vossis. The Asinnos probably cared nothing about Adrian.

Da Tiena continued: "When I arrived, Giovanna del Noppo and her daughter were there, preparing to dine with the doge. I felt intrusive. I would have left; however, Flaminio insisted that I stay. He said there wasn't any problem, that he was innocent and could prove it, and had a servant show me up to a guest room in the southeast corner on the second floor in that

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area of the palace where the doge and his family have their private apartments until he had a free moment to speak to me."

Da Tiena reached over to the bowl, again tossed one nut to Adrian and cracked one for himself. He waited until he'd finished it before he resumed.

"After perhaps half an hour Flaminio came in. He told me a long, complicated story, about how scented soap identical to the Di Sippa soap had appeared in his customer's country shortly after our ship arrived. I thought he was preparing to accuse me or my crew, and I'm sure my hand was tightening on the hilt of my sword. Instead, he blamed his customer. Flaminio said that his customer had received and sold the soap, then claimed afterward that he'd never received it, in the expectation that he could extract another payment from someone."

The story sounded plausible to Adrian and something on his face must have communicated this acceptance to Da Tiena, who shook his head.

"No, Signor Della Cle. I told you: I knew Flaminio well enough to know when he was lying. Again, he was lying. He's the one who substituted wood for soap and I told him that. He became angry. We exchanged words. Suddenly he drew his dagger. He did it so fast that even though I should have expected it—being in the heat of an argument—and even though I had my own hand on my sword hilt, he took me by surprise. He was ready to run me through. I expected it. He was that angry. But then he calmed down, said that it would be impolite to kill a man who was his father's guest, and stormed out of the room, slamming the door behind him. Soon afterward, the doge's guards entered the room and informed me that Flaminio had been murdered just ten paces from my door."

A long silence followed Da Tiena's words.

Adrian asked the next question although he knew in advance that the only possible answer would be a negative one: "Did you tell the doge's guards about your argument and about Flaminio's pulling a knife on you?"

"Yes."

So much for certainties.

"They believed me," continued Da Tiena. "It took them awhile to be sure, but in the end they were convinced that everything happened as I related it. Even the doge believed it. Of course, everyone in Venice knows my reputation for telling the truth, even when it's to my disadvantage. Also, I had my sword and dagger on me and the servants confirmed that there was none kept in the room. There were no Florentine

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daggers anywhere in the house."

"What happened to Flaminio's dagger?"

"He had replaced it in its sheath."

Adrian said nothing.

Da Tiena reached into his bowl again, withdrew another two nuts, tossed one to Adrian and cracked one open for himself. Adrian walked to the desk, cracked his open, and let the shell drop to the floor.

"Which tells me," said Adrian, "that Flaminio was struck down by one of the women or by the doge himself."

"How so?"

"If your account is accurate, then Flaminio left your room with anger in his heart and a dagger in his hand. He immediately met someone in the hall. He put away the dagger, so whoever it was must have represented the exact opposite of danger to him. Either that, or he held their anger at him to be of no physical danger. A man usually doesn't feel endangered physically by a woman — although I can tell you that . . . well, no, I won't tell you—nor does a grown son feel endangered physically by his father."

Da Tiena smiled. "You've come to my own conclusion, Signor Della Cle."

"You too have suspected the women or the doge?"

"I admit that I never thought of the doge, but I've always believed it was Giovanna. It had to be one of three people who were in the southeast corner on the second floor at the time Flaminio was there. There's only one stairway down from that corner because of the construction that has been perpetual in the palace for the last half century and that has blocked off the other exits. His body fell across those stairs, which are narrowed because of the workmen's platforms attached to the wall, so that whoever stepped over him would have left their print in his blood. The entrances to the third floor were blocked off for carpenters and artisans to work there. Since I knew that I hadn't murdered Flaminio, I knew it had to be one of the women."

"But you specifically mentioned Giovanna."

"She has a temper. I tried to bed her once myself and found out about that temper when I spoke the first personal word. She shrieked, picked up a plate, and threw it at me. I ran. She chased me out of the palazzo we were both visiting. I tried to jump into the boat I'd hired, misstepped, and fell into the Canale di Cannaregio. She continued to scream and curse at me while the boatmen laughed and I swam for a boat farther away from the palazzo. . . . Yes, a fiery temper indeed. The only

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problem is that neither woman had a motive."

"One of them did," said Adrian. "Your account of one change in Flaminio's behavior made me realize what was the motive for his murder."

Giovanna and Vittoria del Noppo came down the stairs together. Never had Adrian seen two such beautiful women at one time in a house of the aristocracy. Giovanna tried to look amused, but Vittoria was clearly annoyed.

"Well, Signor Della Cle," said Giovanna, "I see that you have brought a friend with you this time."

"He's no friend of mine, Signora Del Noppo," protested the gonfaloniere. "He's a Florentine who works for the Vossis."

The hatred in the gonfaloniere's voice was so strong that Adrian regretted having to bring him. There'd been no choice. He'd gone to the doge, told him his theory; the doge had listened in a civil manner. The doge hadn't been convinced. Adrian knew that the old man would've preferred to toss him into prison on the ground floor of his palace rather than to order that the police commander accompany him to the Palazzo Noppo to interrogate a respected member of a patrician family.

"I know he is," said Giovanna. "I don't know why he has returned with you, unless it is to charge that I or my daughter is a murderess."

"I regret to say, signora, that this is the case," said Adrian.

"What!" said Vittoria.

Giovanna only smiled sardonically and asked, "What leads you to this conclusion, Signor Della Cle?"

Adrian paused. He was facing the Del Noppos, who stood at the bottom of the stairs in the palazzo's main hall. The unsympathetic gonfaloniere stood near him, but turned in such a way to signal that, whoever he had entered with, his loyalty as a Venetian and as a man was to the Del Noppos. Adrian couldn't blame him. Were their situations reversed, he would behave the same. Because he did understand the gonfaloniere's thinking, he realized that he would have to prove guilt here beyond a doubt. He couldn't do that, though. All he could do was relate what he believed had happened and hope that it would spur the guilty woman to confess. She had little to lose even if they hanged her.

"Well," prompted the gonfaloniere. "We're waiting, sir."

"Very well. First, the dagger. Florentine. Nothing spectacular there, since Florentine-made daggers are common through-

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out northern Italy. But the doge's servants reported at the time of the murder that no Florentine daggers were kept in his house. That means whoever killed Flaminio di Sippa brought the dagger into the house with her. Ciriaco da Tiena had his own dagger on him at the time the guards entered his room and so did Flaminio di Sippa himself. That left the two ladies, members of a family with as close ties to Florence as any Venetian family could have."

"Until now!" said Vittoria, her blue eyes flashing.

"Then there's the manner in which Flaminio di Sippa was stabbed. He came away from Da Tiena's in a huff, carrying his dagger. In the hall he met someone whom he perceived to be so harmless that he put away his weapon, even though he was probably still angry with Da Tiena. Whomever he met, he allowed her to walk right up to him and stab him in the heart."

"With what motive?" demanded the gonfaloniere.

Adrian looked at the two women. Both wore brown dresses. Although the dresses were of the most modern style—indeed, had probably been made the previous year if not in 1481 itself—they were for house wear. Neither woman was heading for a social event in those dresses or in those shoes. There was, however, some fanciness in the dark silk scarf that Giovanna wore over her shoulders and in the long brown gloves that covered her arms almost to the shoulder.

"Revenge," said Adrian, looking into Giovanna's eyes.

Giovanna smiled. "I wasn't that fond of the man," she said. "I stopped seeing *him,* rather than the reverse."

"I know. Ciriaco da Tiena told me you did that soon after you were sick with a fever."

Giovanna flinched.

Adrian knew he had her.

"Tell me, Signora Del Noppo," he said, "have you always worn gloves, even at home on warm days?"

Giovanna didn't answer. Vittoria and the gonfaloniere both looked at her gloves.

"Of course you weren't the only person who began wearing gloves lately," continued Adrian. "Flaminio di Sippa began shortly after you broke off your frien—"

"Enough," interrupted Giovanna. "You win. Obviously you've guessed the truth."

"Arrived at the truth by a careful examination of evidence and observation of detail," corrected Adrian.

"I don't understand any of this," said Vittoria. "What are you talking about?"

"A few months ago your

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mother contracted a fever," said Adrian. "Then she began to wear gloves and perhaps something over her shoulders. She had contracted a disease. About the same time, Flaminio di Sippa also began wearing gloves. Either he had the disease and gave it to your mother, or your mother had it and gave it to him."

"I had it," said Giovanna, "and warned him that he would get it. He began wearing gloves often so that when he did contract it no one would realize it for a longer time than they might otherwise. He occasionally removed the gloves, revealing his clear skin, which would accustom people to think of his skin as being clean beneath the gloves. He wanted to delay being sent away for as long as possible, and I had the same wish for myself. To my knowledge, he never contracted the disease, but since it spreads from person to person and since we had been together often, he was bound to get it eventually. Still, I stopped seeing him."

"But he was less considerate," observed Adrian.

Giovanna's face reddened. "You can imagine my anger when I learned that he had been with my daughter. That he had exposed her . . . destroyed her. He knew I wouldn't say anything to anyone, not for fear of being sent away but for fear that they would send Vittoria away with me when she might not even have developed the disease yet. So I killed him. My opportunity came when we were invited to the palace. It would have done no good to have told Vittoria. The damage was done. Nor could we have stopped the marriage without arousing suspicion, leading to questions. He might have even made the disease public knowledge in revenge. How much time would he have lost by doing that? I don't regret what I did."

Vittoria grabbed her mother by the arm. "What disease?" she cried. "What are you talking about?"

Giovanna used her right hand to slowly roll down the glove that covered her left arm and hand. As she did, the red spots became visible, stark against her creamy skin.

When Adrian saw them, his mouth fell open. He'd been wrong! He'd thought one thing, forced Giovanna to confess because of it, and he'd been wrong. But what were the spots if they weren't what he'd thought?

"Mother," said Vittoria, looking at the spots, "what are they?"

"Leprosy," she said.

Now Adrian was more confused than ever. Before he had a chance to say anything, he had to spring forward to catch

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Vittoria. But the girl didn't faint and caught hold of her mother's arm to steady herself. When she noticed that Adrian had jumped forward to help her, she stared at him resentfully.

Adrian stepped back again, wishing no such encounter with Vittoria as Da Tiena had experienced with Giovanna.

"I've always feared it," Giovanna continued. "Every time I had a fever, I feared that the spots would follow. This time they did, although my face and stomach have been temporarily spared. I don't know how I got it. I've always avoided going near anyone who had it or was even rumored to have it."

Adrian cleared his throat loudly. "I figured it was leprosy," he said. "The fever and the gloves pointed in that direction. Taken in view of Di Sippa's behavior, a perfect motive for your murdering him."

"Congratulations for being so smart," snapped Vittoria angrily.

"I wasn't smart," said Adrian. "I was wrong."

"What do you mean?" asked Giovanna. "I've just admitted it. Everything. I killed him."

The gonfaloniere walked up to her and examined her arm. He looked back at Adrian.

"That's right," said Adrian. "Whatever gave her the fever, whatever gave her the spots, it wasn't leprosy."

Giovanna turned so pale that this time Vittoria stepped over to steady her. Giovanna looked questioningly at the gonfaloniere.

"I'm no physician," said the big man, "but these don't look like any leper spots I ever saw—and I've seen quite a few of them."

Vittoria helped her mother to the stairs, where Giovanna sat down.

"Did Flaminio ever see those spots?" asked Adrian.

Giovanna shook her head.

"Then he didn't realize you were wrong. He believed he'd been exposed and still went with your daughter. Of course, it's not as easy to spread the disease as you believed, but it's hard to feel too sorry for him."

Giovanna looked first at Adrian, then at the gonfaloniere. "What are the spots?" she asked.

They looked at each other, then at her, and Adrian said, "We don't know, signora."

Filippo had difficulty navigating the narrow steps. If there were torches it would at least be possible to see where one was going. The Noppos had always said that since these steps only went between a door and a room, there wasn't need for torches. Of course, the Noppos had seldom come down these steps, preferring to send servants.

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He finally reached the last step. The room was lit by a torch. Ugo was at one of the large vats near the room's center. Filippo hurried over to him.

"Ugo, guess what?"

Ugo turned from the vat and faced him. "What?"

"The gonfaloniere is here. He's talking to the signora and the signorina. That Florentine rascal is with him."

"It must be about the doge's son," said Ugo.

"I was thinking the same thing myself. . . . What are you doing down here this time of day?"

"I'm going to get rid of this vat of wine. It tastes fine, but it's gone bad."

"If it tastes fine," said Filippo, "how do you know that it has gone bad?"

Ugo lowered his voice to a whisper. "I filled a horn of it for myself and Luisa last week."

"If the signora ever catches you—"

"She won't. Besides, these rich people expect us to do that sort of thing. They'll think we do it if we do and they'll think we do it if we don't, so we might as well do it. You understand?"

Filippo nodded.

"Anyway," resumed Ugo, "I took it home last week. I had some of it that first night, got sick with a fever, and then got spots all over my arms and legs. Luisa had some a couple of days ago, got sick, and spots appeared on her. I warned her. I suspected the wine from the start and stopped drinking it a few days ago. My spots are disappearing now."

"Is that the vat the signora's wine has been coming from?"

"For several months. It's her private supply, for herself alone."

"She must have had ill effects too, Ugo. Are you going to tell her?"

Ugo laughed. "Why bother? If it gave her any spots they'll disappear now. Why jeopardize my job? In a few weeks she'll have forgotten all about them."

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UNSOLVED
by
Guy Savant

Unsolved at present, that is, but can you work it out?

The answer will appear in the August issue.

Ten houses on Webster's Row stand empty, just begging to be burglarized. Unfortunately, time is short until all the occupants return—two hours, to be precise. To hit all ten houses in this limited time would be impossible. For the ingenious burglar, then, the question is which combination of houses will produce the greatest take within the given two hours.

The necessary time to get in and out of each house is provided. The clues below are to "key" words that, once solved, will lead to the total worth of each house in dollar amounts simply by transfering the numbers corresponding to the underlined letters in these directions to the letters in the "key" solutions and adding them up. Then all that is required is that you figure out which combination of houses constitutes the highest value possible in one hundred and twenty minutes.

If a definition evades you, don't despair. There is a way around it if you can find it. Good luck with your adventure in breaking and entering.

House #1 (20 minutes) "Put on" _ _ _ _ _ _
House #2 (30 minutes) "Be without" _ _ _ _ _ _
House #3 (35 minutes) "Detective" _ _ _ _ _ _
House #4 (25 minutes) "Monastery member" _ _ _ _ _ _
House #5 (20 minutes) "High school athlete" _ _ _ _ _ _
House #6 (15 minutes) "Italian river" _ _ _ _ _
House #7 (20 minutes) "One thing Santa says" _ _ _ _ _

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House #8 (35 minutes) "Citizen of Istanbul" _ _ _ _ _ _ _ .
House #9 (25 minutes) "Stack of straw or hay" _ _ _ _ _ _ _
House #10 (30 minutes) "Pawn" _ _ _ _ _ _

A = $100	J = $75	O = $20
C = $40	K = $25	P = $65
D = $60	L = $90	R = $55
E = $45	M = $70	T = $85
H = $80	N = $35	U = $95
I = $50		Y = $30

See page 121 for the solution to the June puzzle.

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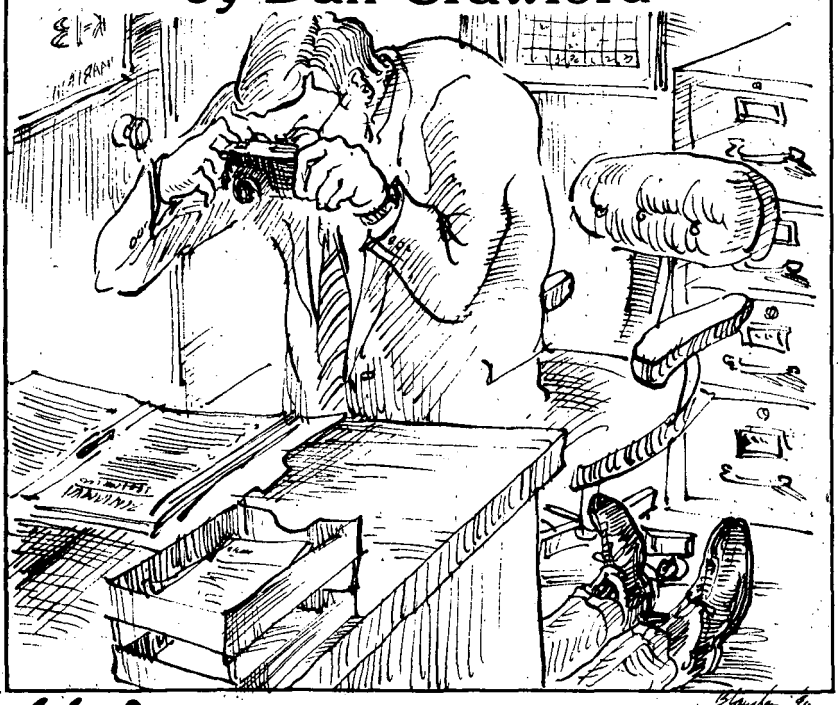
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FICTION

Under Separate Cover

by Dan Crawford



"And what did you want, me boyo?" inquired Finley, looking over the tops of her glasses as he came in.

Elliott was immediately on guard. Whenever Finley wanted something especially distasteful done, she came all over bucolic and Irish.

"You sent for me," he told her, sitting down in the chair in front of her desk.

"Ah, yes," she said, setting down the readout she was studying so she could rub her hands together. "What do you know about Zimiamvia, me boy?"

Elliott raised his eyebrows.

Illustration by Hank Blaustein

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"Missiles," he said.

Finley clapped her hands. "Sure, and the boy's a wonder! That's more than I knew, this time yesterday."

"What do you know now?" Elliott inquired.

She set her elbows on her desk, and her chin on her fists. "There's going to be another volley in the arms reduction war. Removing the missiles around Zimiamvia's going to be part of their proposal. The secretary wants an opinion paper, no later than tomorrow morning, on whether such a move weakens our position, strengthens it, or leaves it about the same. You know the kind of thing: do they mean it, what would come next on both sides, who it helps, who it hurts, what happens to everyone's image if they take their missiles away. There's also a question of a rebel group in the mountains."

"Which mountains?" asked Elliott.

"That's one of the things the secretary would like to know," she told him.

Elliott shrugged. "So why tell me?" he said. "That's Reference's department. I'm in Research. And I just told you everything I know about Zimiamvia."

"Well, Collins is working on the report," said Finley, bringing her arms down to the table and folding her fingers together. "But ours won't be the only one, unless he gets it done really early. INDIST is filing a report, too. If we don't get in first, it would at least be nice to know if their findings are going to support ours, or contradict them. It's even possible that INDIST might have information that would supersede ours. That would be nice to know, too."

"And you couldn't just ask them, I suppose," sighed Elliott.

Finley turned her head to one side and raised her eyebrows. Elliott knew better, of course. For Intelligence Distribution and Intelligence Administration to work too closely together, or even cooperate, would only support arguments for their amalgamation, with a subsequent loss of both face and jobs for one of the departments.

"In any case, me bucko," Finley said as Elliott shrugged again, "we'd just like a little glance at their report. Take care of it, would you?"

"I suppose," he said and left the office.

In his own cubicle, he changed his shirt, put on a tie and jacket, and combed his hair down with a touch of Vitalis. He considered the effect in the mirror and added a pair of glasses. Then he strolled down the hall to the INTAD Resource Center to chat with the INTAD Resource Ad-

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ministrator, whose desk sign said "Librarian."

Majors was a narrow-faced man going grey in the service of his library, which dealt with nothing so mundane as a bound volume (though there was a copy of *The Diamond Smugglers* in the bottom left drawer of his desk). He considered Elliott's identification gravely and then asked, "What can we do for you, Mr. Elliott?"

"I need some kind of I.D. that will fool your counterpart at INDIST," he said. "And I should know how to ask for information on Zimiamvia: folder numbers or subject codes, that kind of thing. Unless they've put it all on disc."

Majors' usually placid face twisted in a sneer. "Them! They're still using the Maunsell Classification System!"

Elliott agreed that this was very bad, very bad indeed. It just went to show you. To him, the strings of letters and numbers sounded as though they came out of the same alphanumeric system Majors favored, but then codes were not really Elliott's department either.

Armed with the new identification to verify his new face, and a series of numbers, he moved to the back staircase. If you used the front steps, you faced a bank of glass doors through which you could be studied all the way up, should anyone be interested in you. At the elevators, you had to join a crowd. But the back stairs, original with the building, were dusty, loose, and dark. They were favored by agents sneaking out early, or slipping in after a three-hour lunch, and it was a matter of courtesy not to stare at anyone you happened to pass on the way up or down.

Elliott met no one on the way. He stepped out into enemy territory, straightening his tie. If he remembered correctly, that plain brown door on the left ought to be INDIST's resource center. He slid his new identification card into the little slot to the right of the frame.

The door clicked, and he pushed it open. A smallish woman with a snub nose stared at him with eyes just like Majors'. "Yes?" she demanded.

He presented his card and started to reel off his numbers. Her mouth slipped to one side as she turned toward her domain. "All this fuss over those four missiles in Zimiamvia," she muttered.

Elliott shrugged. "And now they decide they want a second analysis from another angle. Like I have nothing better to do than tiptoe around everything they wrote in the first report."

"Yeah, and they don't come any touchier than Marianek." She pressed a button under the

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counter and the door on his left clicked open. "You can use that carrel over there," she said.

"Marianek," said Elliott, with a deep sigh. He meant it, too. Of course it would have to be somebody he knew.

He took the folders she gave him and went to the little study carrel to make slavish and useless notes for the better part of an hour. After the sixth time he checked his watch, he took the folders back to her, along with a new folder containing the raw materials of his "report."

"Lunchtime," he said. "Be back as soon as I think I can face it again."

She checked over the folders to be sure everything was in order and then buzzed the door for him again. "See you," she said.

Marianek had cubicle K-13 at the end of the hall, in the middle of a vast "open environment" maze of grey-walled cubicles. Elliott had reached K-row when he slipped back into L-row and around the corner. Marianek, Sutter, and Arnow passed along the corridor. "Gotta stop at Supplies on the way out," Marianek said. "Gotta get a cover."

"Oh, get it on the way in," Arnow told him.

Once the trio had moved along, Elliott moved back into K-row and found the thirteenth cubicle. The door was closed, of course. He studied it. Someone would be bound to complain if he was seen climbing over the wall to jump down inside. He wondered what kind of alarm INDIST used, feeling in his pocket for a key that might fit.

Stooping a little, he peered at the lock, knob, and door frame. Then, with a shrug, he put one finger against the door. The door swung inward; it hadn't latched.

Elliott stepped inside quickly and pushed the door nearly shut behind him. There was no point getting locked in. He turned to look around the room. The report titled *Zimiamvia: Current Situation and Implications of Missile Withdrawal* sat right in the middle of the desk. Elliott reached into his jacket pocket for his camera.

He was shooting page eighteen's better side when he froze.

"No, the rest of the guys went on ahead," Marianek was saying. "I'll catch up with you. And don't eat all the chips before I get there."

Elliott was out of the chair and across the room before the knob rattled. His camera was in his pocket; taking its place in his hand was a narrow black object from an inner pocket of the jacket. This hand was above his head.

Marianek walked in, saw Elliott, and knew it was too late to do anything about him. There

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was just time to spit, "You should *see* the code name we use for you!" before Elliott's hand came down.

Elliott pushed the door shut again, listened to hear if anyone was missing Marianek, and then tucked him away under the desk. There was no fear Marianek would raise an alarm when he woke up; he wouldn't like it spread around that he'd left his door unlatched. He'd find some quiet, private way to take revenge.

Finishing his photography, Elliott paused halfway to the door. With a shrug, he walked back to the desk and checked the level of coffee left in Marianek's mug. Marianek took it black, he noticed. Pages thirty through thirty-four had a nice set of maps on each page, so he opened the report at that point and poured the coffee liberally over both stacks of manuscript. Finley would be very pleased if INTAD got its report in before INDIST could forward Marianek's work.

"Ah, very nice," she said when he brought in the camera. "Any particular trouble?"

"I wouldn't say so; except basic hunger," Elliott said. "I'll be at lunch."

"There is just one other little thing," she told him before he could make it out the door.

He stopped.

"I'd have called you, but you know how I hate to disturb you when you're working. Majors is missing a set of maps."

"Tell him to check all the pockets of his spare suits," said Elliott. "If he has any other suits. We'll chat after lunch." He put a hand on the doorknob.

"They're classified maps of Zimiamvia railroads," Finley told him. "And Fred Marianek was hanging around the library earlier this morning, apparently to argue about classification systems. He wonders if Marianek would know he could win points by borrowing that folder so Collins couldn't finish our report."

Elliott turned around. "Marianek was on this report," he said. "I don't suppose you want me to go look around for it or anything?"

She beamed at him. "Such a bright boy," she said. "Someday we'll be retiring your number."

"I can see the plaque," he sighed. "Died of starvation in line of duty." He marched out the door. How likely was Marianek to be awake by now?

"Hey!"

Elliott turned in the direction of the hiss. Gwynn beckoned to him from the door of the reception area. "I heard you're working on Zimiamvia," she whispered.

"Kind of," said Elliott. "Why?"

"Look, are you going to need maps of the railroads for it?"

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Gwynn asked, looking left and right.

"You know where they are?" Elliott asked her.

"In my cubicle," she whispered. "I got them out of the library last week for those statistics on railroad lines."

Elliott frowned. "Doesn't Majors keep records on that?" he demanded. "We just heard the maps were missing."

"Well, I, uh, didn't check them out," she admitted. "You know how hard it is to get Majors to let you take anything out of his holy of holies. I just kind of borrowed them, and I was waiting for the right time to give them back."

"Let me have them," he said. "I've got a place in mind to tell them where I found them."

"Thanks," said Gwynn. "I owe you one."

Finley was on the phone when Elliott carried in the missing folder. She nodded to him, and he sat down to wait for her to finish.

"Thank you so much, sir," she said. "Yes, we'll do that. Thank you."

She closed her eyes and then slammed the receiver down. "Nice quick work," she told Elliott. "Just take it down to Majors, will you?"

Elliott picked up the folder. "I thought Collins needed it."

"Not any more." She opened her eyes. "That was the undersecretary; they don't need a report from INTAD or INDIST now, though they'd like us to put them on file for future reference. TRADINT-W got a report in an hour ago, and they feel that's all they'll need."

Elliott frowned, trying to remember what TRADINT-W stood for. "Wait a minute. Doesn't TRADINT-W just cover trade relations between Albania and underdeveloped countries? A three-man department on the sixth floor?"

"That's right," said Finley. "But since that grain deal in '86, it's been our procedure to pass along all outdated material on Zimiamvia for their reference files. They heard the secretary was interested in Zimiamvia, patched together a report, and scooped us all."

Patting the folder on his left knee, Elliott demanded, "You mean the secretary's going to make a recommendation based on a report filed by an underdepartment using material that's three years old? What's that going to do?"

Finley was staring at a picture of Derry hanging above the potted hoya. "It's going to remind us to watch TRADINT-W a little more closely in the future."

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Dreams of Death

by Robert Hood

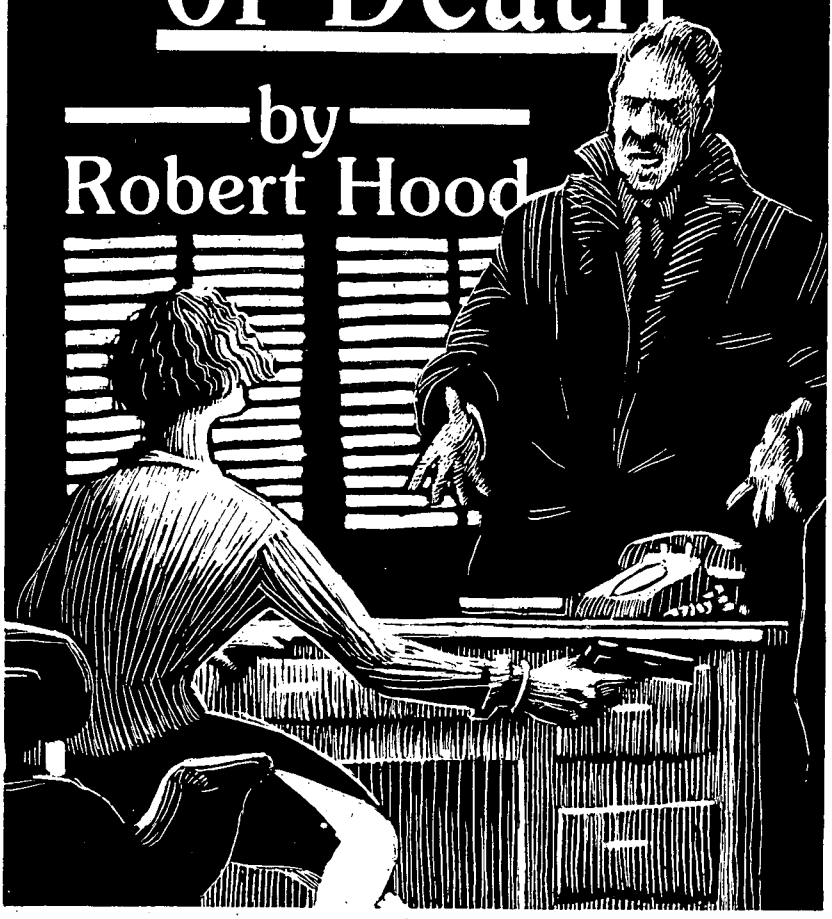


Illustration by Timothy Foley

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I know what you think, Avarez. A corpse, bullet holes, and a matching Smith and Wesson handgun are reasonably conclusive as evidence goes, but I tell you it's not murder, despite appearances. For this to be murder there'd have to be a real body, solid evidence which doesn't disappear with the sun's rising. Blood clots, wounds don't heal, lips stay cold and can tell no tales. Life doesn't go on. That's murder.

Give me a chance and I'll explain.

He was in my outer office when I arrived that morning; the way he looked he might have slept there. Haunted eyes drifted over me as I shut the door. I thought: *This one needs a good feed.*

"I want to see Mr. Wolfe."

"I'm Mr. Wolfe," I said.

"I was looking for Andy Wolfe. I was told he was a first-rate investigator."

I walked past into the inner office, unlocking with practiced indifference—briefcase still in hand, no coffee spilt from the Styrofoam cup I'd collected on my way through reception. You can't say I haven't learnt any useful skills since leaving college. I gave the corpse a vampish glance over my shoulder. "Andy Wolfe *is* a great investigator," I said, "but he's also a woman. You want to come in and tell me your problems?"

Not quite true, of course: I'm competent rather than great. Greatness is a form of immortality that comes through death or fiction—either way, I can't be walking around and still be great. I'd never dealt with any immortal cases, not until that day anyway. And this guy didn't look like the type of client that'd bring me fame. For two years I'd been praying my door would be darkened by someone other than insurance assessors, distraught spouses, worried parents, and little old ladies who'd lost their Tiddleses. Two years, and still nothing.

I took off my coat, opened the Venetian blinds and sat behind my desk. He was standing disconsolately on the far side of the door, the bags under his eyes darkening as I watched.

"For god's sake, sit down." I gestured at a padded leather chair. The chair consumed him; it slouched backwards at an angle just severe enough to make clients feel nervous. Gives me a chance to smile reassuringly. Which I did.

"You're a woman," he said.

"So I'm told." It's not a conclusion that's hard to come to, even this close to the Cross. I'm about average height, with short brown hair, large hazel eyes, and curves that are unmistakably female, depending on what

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I wear. On this occasion I was wearing tight-waisted designer jeans and a blouse with an open neckline. "Does it matter?"

His mouth moved oddly; perhaps it was a smile. "No, I hadn't expected it, that's all. It's a plus that you're a woman. It'll make things better."

"Oh? How?" I like to think my sex is irrelevant in most contexts.

He shook his head and fell quiet, his mind wandering off with the fairies. I cleared my throat and indicated the ball was in his court.

Anxiety passed over his face as he gripped the chair's leather arms tightly. It was an interesting face if you ignored the despair lying just beneath the surface, ready to turn it to misery at a moment's notice. Lean and hungry, but interesting. Neat black eyebrows, green eyes, receding hairline, a three-day growth which looked like it was cultivated. I suggested he start with his name.

"My name . . ." He paused as if it were elusive. Was I about to get a pseudonym? "My name won't mean anything to you."

"I'd rather not call you Thingamy."

The left side of his mouth wrinkled. "Archibald, then," he said. "Archie."

"How can I help you, Archie?"

"I might need protection," he muttered. "Could you protect me?"

"I've got a license for this . . ." I said, rooting around in the top drawer of my desk. The Smith and Wesson was under a pile of bank statements, all unexciting; I pulled it out and waved it around vaguely: I don't like guns, they make me nervous. "Though I'd prefer not to," I added. I put the gun back in the desk drawer. "I don't normally do bodyguard work. Why would you need protection anyway?"

"Promise me you won't call the police, at least until you hear me out."

I shrugged. He swallowed again, hesitated, looked at the ceiling, seemed to like what he saw there, and after a moment reluctantly dropped his eyes back to me. "I might have killed someone. Perhaps several people."

"What do you mean, 'might'?"

"I have dreams," he said. "Dreams of murder. But I think they're more than dreams. I think they're memories."

I thought he was a crazy, of course; but I listened as he described the dreams. His face seemed to blank out every now and then, as though he were too finely tuned to keep focused for long. It didn't fill me with confidence.

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"The main thing about the dreams is that while I'm in them I feel great joy."

"Joy? What's the cause of joy? Not the actual killing?"

"Perhaps. I don't know." He looked up nervously. "It's as though I've been . . . I don't know . . . set free. Like being released from a cage."

"What are you freed from?"

"I don't know that either."

In his most recent dream he was standing on a platform at Redfern, waiting to catch a train into the city. As the train pulled in, he pushed a thin man in front of it. He didn't see the man clearly, but he did live out the man's death. He saw, as the victim might have seen it, the bulk of the train and the smeared white dot of the driver's face. The train hit, threw him aside. He saw blood burst across the metal; a few drops reached the ridge of grimy brickwork along the opposite platform edge. He felt his knee break on a sleeper. His head went under a wheel, and in his final moment of consciousness he actually heard his skull crack. As the bone shattered, he laughed joyously.

"When I woke from the dream I was sitting near a fountain, drinking from an old whisky bottle. I was wearing a filthy cardigan with holes in it. Water was drifting onto me, because a strong breeze was blowing."

"Has it occurred to you it might be just what it seems? Vivid, but a dream. Too much booze'll do it every time."

He stood suddenly, proving he was a lot less languid than he looked. His hand slapped onto the desk and withdrew, leaving a thin bundle of fifty dollar bills. "I'm sure it happened, just as I dreamt it. Here's five hundred dollars. Check it out for yourself . . . and then find out who I killed, and who else I might have killed. I want to know why. I'll call back here on Wednesday, if I'm still alive."

"Why would you be dead?"

He breathed deeply, so his throat rumbled. "Maybe these people I'm killing are out to kill me too," he said.

Part of me wanted to forget the whole thing. Give him his money back. Go chase up a lost husband or two. But that part of me hadn't wanted to be an investigator at all. Private dicks are something found in American mystery magazines and Raymond Chandler novels, it said; and women aren't cut out to mimic Humphrey Bogart.

The other part of me intuitively sensed more than lunacy in this Archibald character. He didn't seem evil; he seemed like he needed help. Maybe he

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was right; maybe someone was trying to kill him and he was retaliating. Maybe an accident had skimmed off his memory. Maybe he hadn't done a thing and was merely the victim of his own imagination. There were a lot of maybes, and I thought maybe I'd like to sort out some of them. Archie was kind of cute, in a grim, distancing way. And the poor man was desperate and very confused.

I began my investigation with a Redfern station guard—and hit paydirt straight off. A bloke had gone under a train on Thursday morning. A real mess. Wrecked the schedules, the guard said. Commuters were bitching for the rest of the day.

"What was this guy like?" I asked.

"Buggered if I know," the SRA man laughed. "Completely mangled." He ground out a cigarette with his boot. I described Archie and asked the guard whether he'd seen him around the station that day. He said, "You must be kidding. Whaddya think I got? Photographic memory or somethin'?"

When I examined the spot where the accident had taken place, I found a stain that looked like blood on the edge of the platform opposite. Archie had known about that spray of blood. Hard to know how if he hadn't been intimately involved.

The body had remained unidentified; nothing on him at all. No one had come forward to claim him, though there'd been a bit on it in the papers. I read the article in the state library. Generalized, nothing helpful. There was a vague picture of police and public milling about some shadowy lumps on the track.

Police records gave the cause of death as misadventure. Witnesses said the guy had seemed to slip. I made a note of their names. If homicide were involved here, as Archibald claimed, then one of these bystanders could be the culprit, not Archie. The doctor who'd signed the victim's death certificate told me it was pretty obvious what had killed him. No sign of anything else. He smirked, "No bullet holes, if that's what you mean, love."

But by late Tuesday evening I still hadn't tracked down the body. Everyone thought someone else had dealt with it. When I pointed out to a rather surly young desk cop that the corpse seemed to have walked away of its own accord, he made a tasteless joke about necrophilia. I said in some cases there wasn't much difference between the living and the dead, at least in terms of mental activity.

His immediate superior was just as dismissive. "What's it

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matter?" the redfaced cop sighed, as though he had better things to think about. Perhaps he did. "We've got the reports; if anyone turns up wanting him, we'll look harder. It was just some derelict who suicided, Miss Wolfe. No one's interested, and there's nothing to find out from the corpse anyway. The head was completely mashed."

After that I visited one of the witnesses—Mrs. Anne Milgate, who'd been standing right next to the dead man when he "slipped" under the train. Being a witness made her indignant. "I'm still having nightmares, dear," she said. "Some of his blood got on my dress."

We had tea in delicate china cups; Mrs. Milgate told me how she'd been about a meter or so from the man when he went under. "I was looking right at him," she said, biting into a scone. "He just fell forward."

"Was there anyone closer to him?"

"Oh, I think so. It's hard to say."

"Do you think someone might have pushed him?"

She considered the proposition, as though I'd asked her whether she'd like another cup of tea. "Murder, you mean?"

"Perhaps just an accident."

"It's possible. I couldn't say."

I then described Archie and asked her whether she'd seen anyone fitting this description around about when the accident happened. "Well, dearie," she whispered, nodding her head in a secretive manner, "that sounds rather like the poor man himself, doesn't it?"

Not very helpful, I thought.

As it turned out, even though I expected he'd regret his decision to bare his soul to me and go into hiding, Archie was in my outer office when I got there on Wednesday. I told him what I'd found thus far, even the detail of the blood on the platform. "It could have been a guess on your part, of course," I suggested. "It's fairly likely blood would be splashed about in an accident as mutilating as that one."

"But how did I know about the accident at all?"

"The newspaper?"

"I never read newspapers."

"A radio then." I leaned forward, emphasizing the point. "Look, the story would have been on the air that morning." I gestured to stop him speaking. "I know you're going to say you didn't hear any news, but maybe you just don't remember. A peripheral experience perhaps. Got into your head over a background P.A. or someone's Walkman. It's at least as likely

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as that you killed the guy."

He turned inward, head drooping, green eyes glazing over. The fingers of his left hand began to twitch, as though he were squeezing an invisible rubber ball. "We could prove it by working out your movements," I said. "Mr. X died at roughly nine twenty under the train from Sutherland. Where were you then?"

"I don't want you to prove I wasn't there. I killed him. I know it. I just want you to find out why. I want a reason. I want you to prove I'm not just a monster."

"But that's ridiculous. Wouldn't you rather I proved you were somewhere else at the time?

"No."

"Why not?"

He swallowed, licked his lips. "It's pointless, don't you see? I don't want it to go on forever."

I fell silent, trying to balance out how much trouble he'd prove to be, what his motives were.

"Will you take on the job?" he asked.

"Will you answer my questions honestly?"

He nodded with a foreigner's nervous stiffness.

"Start with your name." I pushed him a pad and a pen. "Your real one. And your address." His tongue crept between his lips, wetting them. That haunted look appeared from its concealment, like a mouse sniffing the mingled scent of cheese and cat.

"All right," he said and started to write.

"And I'd like to see some identification . . ." He glanced up, startled. "It's not that I'm suspicious; it's just, well, I don't trust anyone."

"I haven't got any," he muttered. "Not on me and not at home." As he spoke he was tapping the pen on his palm.

"Driver's license? Plastic money? Library card? Bank account passbook?"

"No." He jabbed with the pen; blood dripped onto the desktop. He didn't seem to notice.

"Well, where do you keep all that money you flash around then?" I said with some exasperation.

"My pocket," he replied, humorlessly.

His name, he claimed, was Archibald Fountain—or at least that's what he'd been calling himself for the last week or so, which was as far back as he remembered. The first memory he had was of sitting near the fountain in Hyde Park, after waking up from his dream of murder. Wouldn't you know it? An amnesiac.

"You, my friend, need a doctor, not an investigator," I said when he told me.

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"They can't help me. If I find out why I'm killing these people, that'll be the end of it. I know it will." He uttered the words with conviction.

"What about hypnosis?"

"No. I'll give you two thousand dollars in advance."

"Two thousand . . ."

"Please. Aren't you the least bit curious?"

I closed my eyes and sighed. I *was* curious, no doubt about it.

I began by getting from him a description of all the other dreams he'd had. There were, in all, five dreams of murder: the one at Redfern, then another involving a car accident, one featuring poison, one in which he'd held a man against a toilet wall and blown his head off with a sawn-off rifle, and a fall from the top of a multistory building. Lots of different deaths. Plenty of telling details to go with each of them.

One problem was, of course, that most of the "murders" from the other dreams could not be placed as accurately as the train incident. They included no specific place, like Redfern station—which had been identified in his dream by the gardens and a station sign. I assumed the murders, if they were murders, would all have taken place in the Sydney area and checked as well as I could. The car accident was hopeless—there were too many; the poisoning might not have been reported as such; likewise the fall. The toilet killing was a different story. About three months ago someone had been killed in a toilet—in fact, one of the toilets in the George Street Hoyts cinema complex. The police report said a patron of the complex (he was there to see *The Evil Dead II)* heard a shot and subsequently discovered the body in an unlocked cubicle. He saw no sign of a murderer. Okay, the fact that it corresponded closely to Archie's dream was weird enough, but there were other similarities, too. First, the victim was never identified. Like the bloke who went under the train at Redfern a few months later, he was carrying no means of identification, and no one claimed him. Police assumed the murderer had taken his wallet, or that he hadn't had one. Second, the body had told them nothing. It was just a corpse, of average height, slight, perhaps thin in build, dressed in old, unremarkable clothes. The man's head had been blown apart, the corpse examined and buried without ceremony.

And as there were no fingerprints on the gun except those of the victim, it looked like suicide anyway.

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But in his dream Archie, while killing the man, had noticed that one of the victim's ears was torn off and had landed in the open toilet bowl. You commented on it yourself, Avarez, when I came to talk to you about the death. "You wouldn't guess what I found after we'd shifted the corpse," you said. "The bloke's ear! Lounging like a turd at the bottom of the bowl. Funny, in a way, isn't it?"

"Hilarious," I mumbled.

It's a pity I didn't ask you for fingerprints, Avarez, because, as it happens, those fingerprints would have broken the case wide open. But I didn't know that at the time and I couldn't imagine exactly what I'd find out from them. Something was nagging at me, but I couldn't think how to resolve the feeling, and so I just left it to grow by itself. When you told me your files hadn't coughed up a name to put to the fingerprints, I simply let it drop.

Meanwhile I was becoming more convinced that something weird was happening—and more frustrated that I didn't seem to be able to get anywhere with the case. And my attitude to Archie was changing. At first I'd thought he was a harmless enough looney, but now the possibility was growing that he might actually be some kind of dangerous ghoul. Coincidences continued to pile up, and like most investigators I'm naturally suspicious of coincidence. Do you understand what I was thinking, Avarez? Concede he was killing these people—perhaps, if he was, his conscious mind didn't want to know about it, and was making him forget, except deep down, in the realm of dreams. If I started to prove it, would I become a target myself? Perhaps that's what he wanted. He made me nervous, remembering his gaunt stare and the twitchy discomfort from which he appeared to suffer.

About then I decided I'd follow my initial instincts and suss him out. I know what you're thinking: he was my client and investigating him wasn't part of my brief. But, Avarez, what would you do? Solving the case *required* me to find out if Archie had actually killed someone—the Hoyts "suicide," or the Redfern train victim. Or someone else. The corpses told no tales, because they weren't available and, when they were, no one had been asking the right questions. The only thing I knew about them was that nothing was known about them. So why were these nameless derelicts getting killed? Did Archie have a phobia about derelicts? His

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intimate knowledge of the deaths must have meant he was the killer; what else could it mean? And who was this Archie anyway, the highly-strung amnesiac who had forgotten everything except some gruesome dreams in which he was a killer. Enough is enough. I had to know more about him because there was nowhere else to go.

Archie had given an address in Annandale as the place where he was staying. I went there and found it inhabited by a banshee. The woman who opened the door reminded me of Archie—she looked like she hadn't had any sleep. "Can I help you?" she said. She was holding the banshee, a screaming baby only a few months old.

"Does someone called Archie live here?" I asked.

"Archie? Not unless you mean one of the cockroaches," she laughed lightly, which seemed quite a feat, given the circumstances. The baby yelled like an air raid siren.

"Any men at all? The one I want might have a different name."

"Only my husband Kevin. He didn't get you pregnant too, did he?"

Now I laughed. "No. I'm an investigator. The guy I'm looking for's my client. Average height, black hair—what there is of it. Green eyes. He looks sort of weary and unkempt."

"The last bit's Kevin, all right. Not the rest, though. Kevin's grossly overweight and has hair like Joanne's." She indicated the baby, who stopped crying suddenly and grinned as though she'd just remembered a good joke. Her hair was curly and red.

"Looks like my client made a mistake. I don't suppose you've had anyone staying here?"

She sighed. "Who'd want to? You'd be better off kipping down in the middle of George Street if you want a good night's sleep." With that, the baby, insulted, began to scream again.

So Archie had lied to me. I wasn't surprised, but it did suggest there was more to him than a simple desire to find out why he was killing people in his dreams. I had no idea *what* that "more" was, but I was determined to find out.

Redfern being the only residential part of the city with which I knew him to be associated, I decided to go there and wander around. There were several doss houses of one kind or another in the vicinity of the railway station, and given Archie's apparently derelict state, I thought I might learn something in one of them. I was

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right. The third one disgorged a short, frumpy woman dressed in a floral dress and an old cardigan who said she was the "landlady."

"Yeah, there was this bloke," she said, "coupla weeks ago. Real doped out—they're all like that, mind. Called himself Joe or somethin'."

I watched the lit cigarette she was balancing on her lower lip, fascinated by her remarkable achievement in keeping it there. "Why do you think this person might be the one I'm after? You must get lots of Joes."

"Sure, honey, sure I do. But this one had money. He'd been stayin' 'ere for maybe three weeks, givin' me a hundred quid for each week's accommodation, like. Then, right at the start of a week he'd already paid for, he went out and was gone for three days straight. I thought he'd just pissed off. But he came back, you see, with blood on 'im, sayin' he couldn't remember a thing."

"That's odd, isn't it? He said he didn't remember a thing, but he found his way back to your . . . establishment?"

"Yeah. Is a bit. Didn't think of that. Guess that's why you're the detective, eh?"

I shrugged modestly.

"Anyways, he reckoned he was Archie now . . . and I shouldn't call him Joe. 'Joe's dead,' he said. 'I'm Archie.' Didn't make no difference to me. Archie it was."

"Did he say where he'd been during those missing days?"

"Na. Hardly said bugger-all. Anyways, he'd lost his memory."

"Oh, yes. So he had."

She leaned against the door frame and began scratching away under her right breast. I was still standing on the front step where I'd been when my knocking roused her. "He was a funny bastard," she said. "Got more and more . . . I dunno . . . sort of desperate. I thought he was gonna bust a valve or somethin' just before he disappeared that time. That's why I wasn't too surprised, see, when he didn't come back. Sometimes at night I could hear him screaming in his sleep. Guess he was havin' bad dreams, eh?"

"I guess so," I said.

She couldn't tell me much else. Archie had left her boardinghouse about the same time he first came to see me. The landlady reckoned he wasn't long for this world.

"I can tell a sick man when I see one," she mused.

Out of some misguided sense of completeness, I'd had prints taken from the arm of the

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chair Archie sat in last time he'd come to see me. When I got to the office next morning there was an envelope waiting for me. No real match could be found, it said . . . sure, it wasn't an official document, Avarez, but I've got friends. One had done a bit of a search and had come up with zilch. He'd written by hand on the report that there was a slight correlation with the prints of someone who'd been put in prison for stock market fraud about ten years ago—but the crim concerned had hanged himself after a month or two. Not very useful.

I suppose I was about ready to give up when Archie shuffled through the door. He was looking all the worse for his two days' absence—drained, tense, and jumpy, like a cat that had found itself trapped in the Municipal Dog Pound. He looked at me through his bloodshot eyes, saying nothing.

"Well," I said, "how's it going?"

"*You're* working for *me*, remember?" He glanced away to avoid eye contact. "What have you found out?"

I pointed at my log notes, which I'd typed on A4 paper and stored in a folder lying at one side of my desk. The folder was marked "Archie the Dreamer." "There's not much there," I said. "You can read it if you like."

He did so, nervously, like a man fascinated by a gruesome pathology report. I'd left out my speculations—they go into my private diary—and the fact that I'd been checking out his lodgings and his fingerprints, so there wasn't a lot for him to read. His eyes finally left the pages and he glanced around the room as though he were searching for a place to hide. "Can't you do better than this?" he muttered.

"You haven't given me much to go on. And as you saw, the bodies of your victims . . . if you know what I mean . . . didn't reveal much. They weren't identified and can't be traced now. One of them even seems to be missing."

He looked as though he wanted to tell me something. It's a look I always associate with people who've read to the end of a whodunit and are dying to spill the beans, even though you're only on page fifty-six. "What is it, Archie?" I asked. "Why don't you tell me what you know?"

I think he almost did. His lips trembled, his pupils widened as though he needed expanded vision for the task ahead, his fingers drew patterns in the air. But as his mouth opened, something grabbed at him from inside his gut, and he drew back again. He shook his head. "I

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can't remember anything."

I nodded, fancying that, for the first time, I'd seen the schizophrenia hiding out in him.

When he left a while later, bearing my assurances that there were avenues I was yet to explore, I followed him, determined to find out where he went, what he did when he got there. His course was a rambling, purposeless one, which took us finally, perhaps inevitably, to Hyde Park. For a long time he sat on a bench near the fountain, its Grecian heroes dripping recycled water indifferently. He'd been staring at the bronze statues for a long time, an hour or so, before I noticed he was starting to tremble. The tremors reached a peak and he bent over double, gripping his head between his hands. Then he sat up again, straight and sudden, and screamed. There were words mingled in the scream, though I couldn't hear them clearly. People walking nearby changed their path to avoid him. He turned.

I was perhaps two hundred meters away, concealed in shrubbery, and for a moment I couldn't tell whether or not he'd seen me. My heart sped up, as the eeriness of his violent glance twisted in my stomach. Even from that distance, his eyes were spooky.

"You!" he yelled. "Free me, can't you? Free me!"

There was a pause in which our eyes met and held. Then I ducked out of sight, hoping he hadn't been looking at me, hadn't recognized me. I was just someone, a person in the distance. I could deny I'd been following him. I could say I was somewhere else. Surely he couldn't be certain it was me, not in shadows as I'd been, not half-hidden by trees and the flowering grevilleas. I felt frantic, frantic not to have seen his eyes, not to have heard his words, not to be known to him. I didn't know why. I just wanted to be away from him.

When I looked again he was gone.

Night fell. I was still in my office, where I'd been since about three. After leaving the park, I'd gone for a walk on Bondi beach, to be in the sun, to be among people doing nothing but being normal. Water relaxes my mind, which needed relaxing. Archie's eyes had scared me and I didn't really know why. The whole case was beginning to scare me. As I saw it, there were several alternatives, one of them being that Archie really was a ghoul, killing people, and suppressing the knowledge, even, perhaps, from himself. After all, here's this

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guy who's an unknown quantity to everyone. No records available. A stranger to his neighbors. He has money, but even he doesn't know where he got it. Perhaps a job he'd forgotten about? He claims to kill people, who all appear to have died by accident or by their own hand. Yet he knows all the details of their deaths, even unpublished details. Weird. Could he be a psychopath? A hit man? I didn't have a clue, but I didn't like it. It felt dangerous. For a while I watched the waves foam up the sand, then I got restless and tracked down a phone. My receptionist Janet told me there'd been no sign of Archie, not in the building and not in the street outside—not that she'd noticed anyway. So I returned to the office to try and piece it all together.

Janet left about five twenty or so, telling me to give myself a break and go home to bed. I only grunted and two hours later was still there, reading over my notes and free-associating all sorts of nonsense. Maybe I even drifted off into sleep, because I suddenly sprang awake, startled by a noise that had become undefinable now that I was conscious. Darkness had crept into the room, blurring edges and turning the green carpet grey. I shivered, listening intently. Nothing.

There was a footfall beyond the closed partition that obscured my waiting room.

"Is there someone there?" I said.

The door opened slowly, but I didn't move. Perhaps I couldn't move. For the first time since I'd opened the agency two years before I was really scared. Archie had got to me.

When an outline I recognized as his entered through the silently opening door, I switched on the desk lamp. He blinked like a fox caught in a car's headlights. "Have you found out who I'm killing?" he said.

I slid open the drawer in my desk and froze with my hand resting on the gun there. "Are you sure you want to know?"

"I asked you, didn't I?" Something seemed to have happened to him. He was shaking and breathing irregularly. "You shouldn't follow me. Just tell me if you know who I murdered," he whispered.

"I think *you* know, Archie. I believe now, for the first time, that you really did kill someone—but I think you already know who and why."

"I don't, for god's sake."

I watched him for a moment, tracing the patterns of tension tightening his body and aching in his face. I could see the age there, decades beyond what I'd thought, like fossilized experi-

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ence beneath the surface of his skin.

"Do you really not know who you are?" I asked.

His breathing was labored. He looked forlorn.

"Okay, you don't know. Well, I sure as hell don't know, either. Here's another question: do you remember hanging around the morgue?

"Is that what I've been doing?"

"Maybe. In the two real incidents I've been able to trace, one of the actual victims disappeared after the crime, and the other is . . . well, untraceable." He looked puzzled, painfully so.

"You mean, I stole the bodies?"

"Maybe."

"What am I trying to hide?"

"You tell me."

He made a choking sound deep in his throat, as though somewhere in his chest the memories were rising. "I can't," he whispered.

Now I decided to lie. "But you forgot the fingerprints, Archie. They tell us a lot." A gargling moan. I could see it in his eyes: he was starting to remember. I pressed on. "The scientific branch has made a tentative crossreferencing, Archie. What do you think of that?" Archibald twisted, jerking like a marionette. "Who the hell are you, Archie?"

"I can't remember . . ." he whimpered, crumbling as he spoke. But his eyes gripped mine, filling with remembrance. "You . . . you can't know what it's like—to dream of death and just feel the dreams pass away with the night. Mostly I don't remember. I don't want to. Why are you making me remember?"

"You asked me to. Why else would you hire me?"

He choked out the words so that I could barely hear them. "Release. To find freedom."

"What do you mean?" I said. My trembling fingers thoughtlessly flipped off the gun's safety catch. "Tell me the truth."

"Nothing's true," he said, his shaking so bad his legs seemed to fold under him. I began to stand, to go to him, but he drew himself up, reforming his body by an effort of will. "You want to know about immortality?" he breathed, like a dying breeze. "Year after year of meaningless living, in a world where there's death you can taste but never gain. For a long time I worked . . . oh yes, I remember . . . I've played the stock market . . . amassed capital in ways you couldn't imagine. But what does it mean? They all died. My friends, my lovers. I'm more alone than anyone has ever been."

"I don't understand," I said,

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feeling as though I was suddenly part of a different scenario, one I certainly hadn't written.

"You understand," he groaned. "You just don't want to admit it."

"Tell me then." I stood suddenly. "Cut the crap and tell me who the hell you're killing!"

He staggered backwards, as though my voice had hit him physically. He was shaken by a massive tremor. "Me!" he cried as it faded. "I'm killing me."

Now I was more confused than ever and the confusion manifested itself as fear, an almost paralyzing fear that was as dark as the night clawing at my windows. "What are you talking about?"

"Suicide. I killed myself." His eyes met mine, and I swear to you, Avarez, after that moment I know what it's like to stare into hell. Perhaps it was simply madness, but to me it felt like damnation.

"That doesn't make sense," I said.

He laughed. "When you're immortal, everything makes sense." He spasmed violently, then clenched his fists to stop the convulsions. His eyes rose again. "I'm immortal, Miss Wolfe. I can't die—though I want to. It's as simple as that. So, when the pressure builds to a point where I can no longer bear the pain, the isolation . . . I kill myself, hoping that this time, this time, there'll come an end."

"You're crazy," I muttered what seemed to be obvious truth. Though even as I said it I remembered the body that had strangely, surprisingly, disappeared.

"Crazy? Yes, I *am* crazy. And I'm also alive." The emphasis he put on the word turned it to filth.

I decided to try reason. "Surely if your body was destroyed, as the body of the Redfern bloke was, surely you couldn't revive?"

"I can!" he said intensely, straight at me. I retreated, my knuckles whitening around the grip of the Smith and Wesson. "It doesn't work that way. One moment I'm dead . . . dismembered. Next I'm somewhere else, whole. Just memories of death, none of the reality."

"So what do you want of me?" I said, utterly out of my depth. I'm not a psychologist.

"Release. I came to you. Because you're immortal, too. You might not know it . . . but I see it in your eyes."

Denial was useless. "What if I am? How would it help?"

"You've got to kill me!" he growled. "Perhaps if immortal kills immortal, then the curse

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will end. You're immortal and you're a woman. Women bring us into the world and must be the ones to force us out of it again. So kill me!" He lunged suddenly, his features ancient and mad. I fell backwards, crashing against the chair. My fingers twitched and the gun fired. Several times. A shot tore into his chest, stopping him and pushing him aside. He seemed to recover, leapt at me, roaring. Compulsively I fired again. The second shot hit his stomach; a third went in his throat. He collapsed with a thud, and lay motionless in a spreading pool.

I didn't move. I was trembling, shocked by the killing, a killing I hadn't anticipated, in vindication of a belief so ridiculous no jury would ever convict me of anything except insanity.

But think about it, Avarez. The lost bodies, the details remembered from his dreams . . . the pattern that falls so easily into place once you give in to this one possibility. Perhaps it's true.

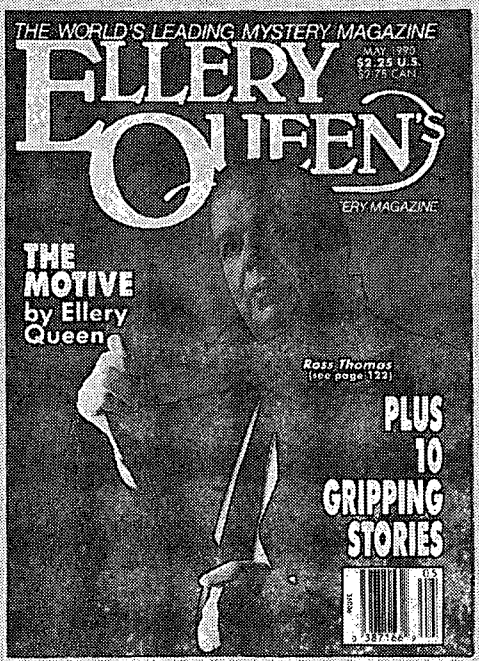
I hope to hell it's true.

His body lay there, doing nothing, but I begged the night that soon it would. Let it shudder, jerk into life, stand to confront me with what I'd done. Then Archie might remember fully, and speak to me again of unending life.

So I wait. You came, Avarez, called here by an interfering neighbor, keen for answers; but in a while you'll discover it's been a waste of time. Archie'll get up and there'll be no murder case against me. No corpse. You'll see. In law death is forever.

Sure, I'm taking risks, gambling with belief. But isn't any risk worth taking in return for the secret of immortality?

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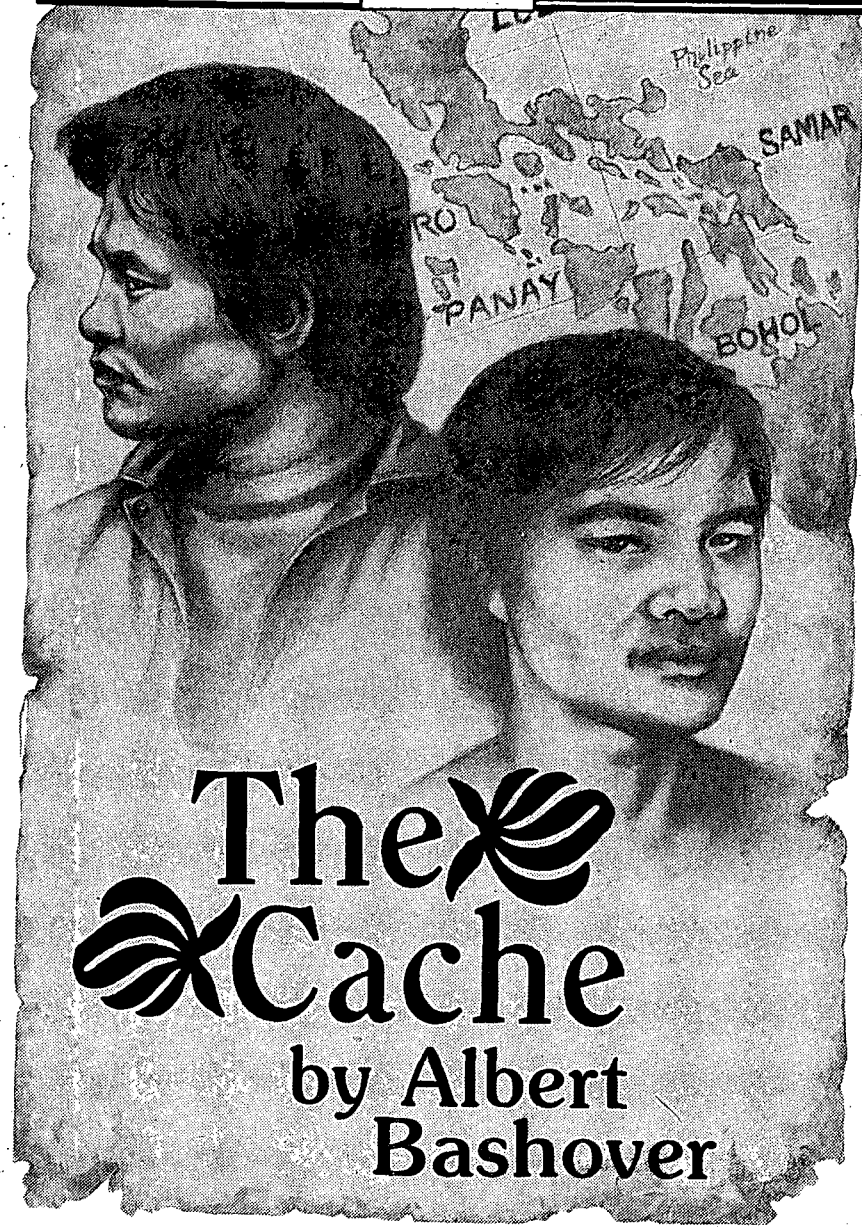
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FICTION



The Cache

by Albert Bashover

Illustration by Timothy Standish

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Pangang is a tiny village on the east coast of Samar in the Philippines. Through a telephoto lens it would look like a picture postcard of an idyllic South Sea island hideaway. Its twenty or so thatched-roofed homes surround an almost perfect arc of white sand that forms a tiny protected harbor. The wide sand beach slides under clear bluegreen water whose small wavelets barely disturb the sand.

It is not until you zoom back with a wide-angle lens that you can see the inaccessibility of the place. Behind the village the jungle extends only about a mile before the mountains suddenly rise straight up, sometimes disappearing into a gray mist. To the north and south of this tranquil arc, the high mountain face, sometimes grey stone, sometimes leafy green, falls vertically, precipitously, into a churning ocean.

Pangang was so inaccessible that few people outside of its inhabitants knew—or cared—about its existence, that is until World War II. Its beautiful harbor was not nearly big enough or deep enough to be visited by ships of any size, but it was well suited to the "bancas," the one sided outriggers used by the villagers for fishing.

Until World War II, fishing was the only thing that went on in the village. The occupying Imperial Japanese Navy ignored it. They did unload a small contingent in the city of Guiuan, several miles to the south, because Guiuan had a large protected natural harbor which might some day be developed. Nothing changed in Pangang, however, until the American Navy CeeBees replaced the Japanese.

The CeeBees, the construction crews of the U. S. Navy, started building up the piers at Guiuan, and it wasn't long before "Liberty" ships were unloading tons of supplies and equipment there. At first the materiel was simply stored on the newly finished docks, but it soon became evident that the local population felt they had more need than the navy for it. For security, the navy then erected dozens of steel Quonset huts on a barren island connected to Guiuan only by a small guarded bridge, but this too proved of limited use against the efficient pilferage of the local populace, whose natural route of travel was by water.

Guiuan soon became the center of two flourishing activities. It was the navy supply depot for that part of the Philippines, and it was one of the main sources of supplies for the black market centered in Manila. The materiel "liberated" from the guarded Quon-

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set huts—cigarettes, powdered milk, Coca-Cola, anything—would find itself repacked into waterproof wrappings of a size and shape that would fit into a banca. Most of these items were worth more than their weight in gold to certain entrepreneurs in Manila. A brave Filipino, with not too much to lose, could paddle his frail, loaded wooden outrigger along the vertical walled coast north of Guiuan, and if he made it past the American patrol boats, the local pirates, and the sudden Pacific storms to Manila, he could feed his family for six months on the profits.

Pangang was the first stop for rest and provisions.

Although Pangang may not have been known to the rest of the world, every black market runner from Guiuan knew it and its friendly elder, "Mayor" Jose Paruma. The chain-smoking, simple-minded old man with the hacking cough was the nominal mayor of Pangang because of his age and his family connections, but most of the real work was done by Jose's two nephews, twelve-year-old "Lame Pedro" and fourteen-year-old Marcos. The two boys provided safe shelter for the runners during the day while American patrol boats scoured the shores. At night the boys would help load the banca with enough food and water to last to the next stop, and the runner would be on his way. All this for a very reasonable cut of the load.

Everyone in Pangang was family, so everyone shared in the income, but of course everyone knew that the largest slice went to Jose. Foolish or not, he was the village elder and his position demanded it. The two nephews might have done most of the work, but they received no more than anyone else in the village. It may seem surprising that the boys would work so hard for so little, but young Marcos, as Jose's closest relative, knew that Uncle could not last forever and someday Uncle's fortune would be his. Uncle Jose smoked constantly and coughed a lot. Marcos knew he would not last long.

Lame Pedro did not have much choice. He also listened to Jose's cough with hope. Even though big brother Marcos stood between him and any inheritance, he knew that when the time came he was clever enough to figure out a way to get rid of Marcos.

Pedro was born with his right leg shorter than the left. His right foot was twisted inward so that it was all but useless. A handmade crutch made walking possible, but with difficulty. At one time, when he was very young, he would try to keep up with big brother Marcos, but everything he did took three times the effort with one

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half the result. In time Pedro grew to hate Marcos for his wholeness, and Marcos returned the hate with disdain for his "crippled" brother. They worked together only because they could see the day when they would not have to look at each other. They would have been surprised to know how closely their dreams paralleled each other.

Eventually the Americans built a road from Guiuan to Pangang. It was no more than a packed-dirt, single-lane groove cut into the side of the mountain. At times it rose several hundred feet above the water before it snaked down to the beach at Pangang. After heavy rains, sections of the road would wash down to the sea, so that travel, even by jeep, was hazardous. The black market suppliers still preferred the sea route, so the hostelry business of Pangang was not affected. The only motorized vehicular traffic on the road was the jeep driven by the naval officer stationed in Guiuan whose impossible job it was to eliminate black market operations in the area. Twice each month he and a Filipino enlisted man would drive up the twisting road, with the jeep in four wheel drive in case a section of road slipped out from under them. The enlisted man was the official interpreter, even though he was barely able to understand this particular dialect. He was from Cotabato, and the dialects changed radically from area to area. He often found it expedient to make up answers during interrogations in order to keep his boss happy.

The interpreter's job hardly mattered in Pangang. The visit was pro forma. Jose would smile, smoke, cough, deny knowledge of everything and anything, and throw a party. The navy officer would be a good guest and go through the routine, knowing he would learn nothing. When the party was over, the two navy men would climb back into the jeep and take off for Guiuan.

This war too, like all wars, ended. The wartime business of Pangang died and the village returned to its old trade of fishing. Everyone knew Jose had made a fortune during the war, but no one knew where it was. He seldom traveled to Guiuan and his living style never changed, so most of the villagers, including Pedro and Marcos, believed Jose had a cache buried somewhere in the jungle behind the village. In that tangled green no one but the one who hid it would ever be able to find it.

Both Pedro and Marcos quietly seethed over the fact that Jose never would let on, even to them, where his fortune was. He was too old to enjoy it. It seemed to the boys that he was trying to take

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it to his grave. And as more and more of the younger people left for the big cities, Marcos felt he too might do well to look for his own fortune in Manila while waiting for Jose to die.

He also knew he could not trust Pedro, so he instructed a cousin, one of the few in the village who could write, to let him know if Jose died or if anyone found where he hid his wealth. Marcos rolled up his belongings and headed north.

Pedro smiled inwardly when he said goodbye to Marcos. His physical limitations might prevent him from competing in the outside world, but with Marcos gone, he could fish and maybe he could quietly and slowly search the area behind Uncle Jose's house. If he found the cache, he would be a rich man. He would be out of the village and gone before anyone knew about it.

It did not work out quite the way either of them planned. Pedro did a little digging and a lot of fishing. The only profit he made was from his fishing. The best Marcos could do was a waiter's job in a restaurant in Baguio. It was five years before Marcos heard from his cousin in Pangang, and the news was not good.

"Dear Cousin Marcos," the letter began, "Uncle Jose has still not told anyone where his fortune is. Yesterday he suffered a stroke. He is still alive but is unable to move or talk. Perhaps, Marcos, you would do well to return to Pangang. If Uncle Jose ever recovers his speech, he may now tell you where your inheritance is."

The letter, surprisingly, had taken only a week to reach him. Marcos lost no time in catching the boat from Manila to Tacloban and the smaller ferry from Tacloban to Guiuan. A short bargaining session with a dock worker in Guiuan got him the loan of a patched-up jeep to take him to Pangang.

When Marcos got to Jose's hut, Pedro was already there. One look at the gaunt figure lying on the mat, glassy eyes staring at the thatched roof, told Marcos that Uncle Jose and his inheritance would soon be gone.

"We must get him to Guiuan. Fast. There is a doctor there. He might be able to get Uncle Jose to talk—I mean, to help him—to get him well."

Pedro smiled at Marcos' verbal slip. He needed no apologies. After all, his fortunes were tied up with Marcos'. He would have to know where the cache was before he could take it away from his brother. "You drive and I will hold Uncle Jose in the back seat."

"No, Pedro. You will drive. I want to be with him in case he starts talking."

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The sky was quickly darkening. A few large drops of rain heralded the downpour that was sure to come. By the time the jeep with the two brothers and the limp figure of Jose was no more than half a mile from Pangang, the rain came down in earnest. The jeep was high up on the mountain road about a mile from Pangang when the laboring engine coughed, sounding a little like Uncle Jose, and died.

Pedro cursed. "We're out of gas. You should have checked how much you had before we started."

"You don't have to get nasty. The gas gauge is broken. You will have to go back to Jose's house. There was a can of gasoline there."

"Are you crazy?" Pedro whined. "I couldn't walk that far in this rain, especially carrying a gas can."

Marcos swore to himself. Lame Pedro was partly right. Pedro might be able to make the trip, but much more slowly than Marcos could. Yet he hated to leave Uncle Jose in Pedro's care. Uncle Jose who might be able to talk at any moment. Unhappily, Marcos pulled his poncho over him, took off his city shoes, and started, barefoot, down the muddy road to Pangang.

It was almost two hours later before Marcos, with the gas can in his hand, returned. He saw the jeep through the still pouring rain. Something was wrong. Pedro was not in the jeep, he was standing alongside of it.

"He is dead. Uncle Jose is dead."

Marcos dropped the gas can and grabbed Pedro's shirt near the neck. "Did he say anything—anything!"

"N-no. Nothing."

Marcos' grip tightened on the shirt. There was fear in Pedro's eyes. Too much fear. Pedro was lying and Marcos knew it. Marcos pushed Pedro to the edge of the road overlooking the dark ocean fifty feet below.

"What did he say? Tell me!"

"Nothing! Nothing! Noth—"

That was when the rain-softened section of road under Pedro's feet gave way, sliding into the ocean. Pedro's body followed, pulling Marcos down so that Marcos was prone on the road. Marcos' hand slipped from Pedro's shirt to his arm, then to his hand. Only Marcos' anger gave him the strength to keep hold of Pedro's hand as Pedro's feet kicked the empty air below him.

"Where is it? Where did he hide it?" Marcos yelled through the roar of the rain and the surf.

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"Help me. I'll tell you. Help me."

"First tell me where he hid it."

Pedro stared up at Marcos, his eyes wide with fear. "Under the floor of the runners' hut—help me!"

Marcos turned away even before Pedro's body hit the rocks and waves at the bottom of the cliff, but not before the picture of Pedro's terrified face burned into his memory. He would never be sure whether it was fatigue or purpose that made him let go. It didn't matter. He would not be blamed. This mountain road had claimed other victims before, and his relatives in the village would be happy to believe the newly wealthy Marcos in whatever story he would make up.

Marcos emptied the gas into the jeep, found a wide spot a little way up the road, and turned the jeep around to return to Pangang.

The rain had stopped and there was still a little daylight left by the time Marcos pulled the jeep with the body of Jose to a stop in front of Jose's house. Marcos had noticed a flat-edged spade when he picked up the gasoline can, in a darkened corner of the room that Jose had used as his bedroom and storage room.

The hut that the boys had swept out so many times for the black market runners was only a little way into the jungle. Just far enough so that it could not be seen from the village. It appeared empty now. Even the bed mats had been removed so that the dirt floor was exposed. The ten by ten foot room smelled musty from the jungle damp and from disuse.

Marcos walked to the middle of the room and jammed the sharp edge of the spade into the ground. The ground was moist and soft. The spade slipped into it easily for about three inches, then stopped against something solid.

A stone?

Marcos wiggled the spade from side to side, exposing a rotted wood surface. Suddenly fatigue did not exist. Marcos shoveled the dirt out the hut opening. More of the wood was exposed. An old navy foot locker! More shoveling. Another foot locker. Marcos worked in a frenzy. In a while there was no dirt floor in the hut, only wall-to-wall foot lockers. All of them had been locked, but the rusted hasps no longer had solid wood to hold onto. Marcos put the sharp edge of the spade between the top and the side of one of the wooden boxes. The top did not open, it just fell away in crumbly pieces, exposing the wrapped contents inside.

For years those wrappings had done their job by fighting off the

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ravage of insects, heat, and water, but they had finally given up. From wall to wall, the once pristine white cartons they contained were now an odorous brown soggy mass. Only faintly could one see on some of the less corrupt cartons the legend "Lucky Strike."

For a while the world froze. Then all the hours of dammed-up fatigue poured in and Marcos slowly sat down on the brown spongy floor. In time a smile, a surprisingly warm smile, began to form on Marcos' face.

Poor crazy Uncle Jose, he thought. In those days during the war, this stash of tobacco must have looked like the wealth of the world to him.

His hand reached automatically to his shirt pocket where his own local-brand cigarettes were. His hand shook slightly as he lit up.

I wonder, he mused, if my waiter's job is still available in Baguio.

Life had often been hard for Marcos. This had been another hard day. A day he would not want to remember. But Marcos was a survivor and he had the ability that many survivors have. He had always been able to remember what he had to remember, and forget what he had to forget.

Poor lame Pedro, he thought.

Marcos was not smiling now.

Maybe I could get a job as a waiter on a cruise ship. Yes, a cruise ship would take me away from here.

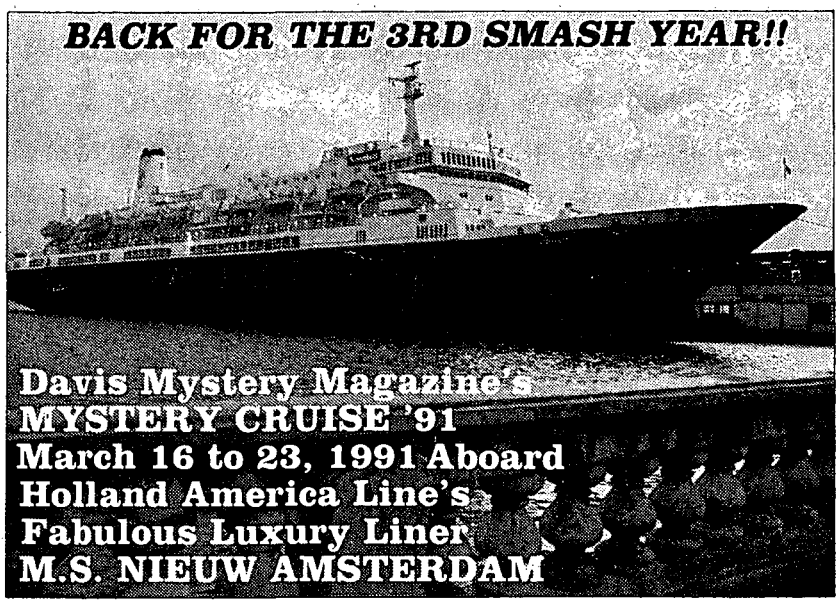
But Marcos was beginning to realize that even a cruise ship could not take him far enough away. Away from the memory of the stench of rotting tobacco, and the memory of Pedro's face as it shrunk away from him into the black, roaring water.

(continued from page 3)

ness" in the June issue). Mr. Black, we're happy to report, has won an ACE award (Emmys for the cable TV world) for his "Dig That Cat—He's Real Gone," an episode for HBO's *Tales from the Crypt* series. Congratulations to him.

On a sad note, we also want to report that Joseph Payne Brennan, whose "Junk" appeared in the June issue, died on January 28th at the age of seventy-one. A poet and writer of supernatural tales for the most part, Mr. Brennan also wrote a number of stories for AHMM over the years. "Junk" was his seventeenth.

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DAVIS MYSTERY CRUISE 1990



1990 DAVIS MYSTERY CRUISE/ Featured above are the participants from our Second Annual Cruise who solved the murder aboard the M.S. Noordam with the aid of mystery authors Bill Crenshaw and Ed Hoch and our "Inspector" from Scotland Yard. Surprise guest was Bruce Cassiday, President of Mystery Writers of America.

Row 1 L-R Rebecca Tarvin, Margaret Carr, Kerry Fandrich, Leslie Kalin, Heather Abendroth, Betty Oakes, Ethel Flach, Christina Erickson, Sandy Klas

Row 2 L-R Dorothy Bell, Barbara McIntyre, Virginia Ragsdale, Helen Ekhardt, Dolores Whiteside, Belinda Isaacs, Lois Glenn Wolfe, Deborah Ann Groff, Mary Stage, Mary Ellen Clifford

Row 3 L-R Marjorie Fox, Morgan Rushing, Florence Artery, Annamae Watt, Gerald Bell, Erma Bleizeffer, Dorothy Axell, Pat Hoch, Rose Margherio, Cynthia Manson, Diane Crenshaw, Stephen Buehler, C. Jean Ogle, John Oakes, Bob Oakes, Patricia Reibert, Richard Carr, Elaine Abendroth, Doris Cassiday, Bernice Carr, Bruce Cassiday, Richard Carr, Jr., Sherri Bowling, Tamara Prather, Don Fenwick, Lou Ann Pasquan, Marky Fenwick

Row 4 L-R Mike Horn, James Ragsdale, Gerald McIntyre, Ed Hoch, Bill Crenshaw, George E. Whiteside, "Red" Ekhardt, Inspector MacPherson, Al Bleideffer, Walter Stage, Jeff Faville, Susan Paterson

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FICTION

Chet and Emily: A Strange Silence

by Karen Parker

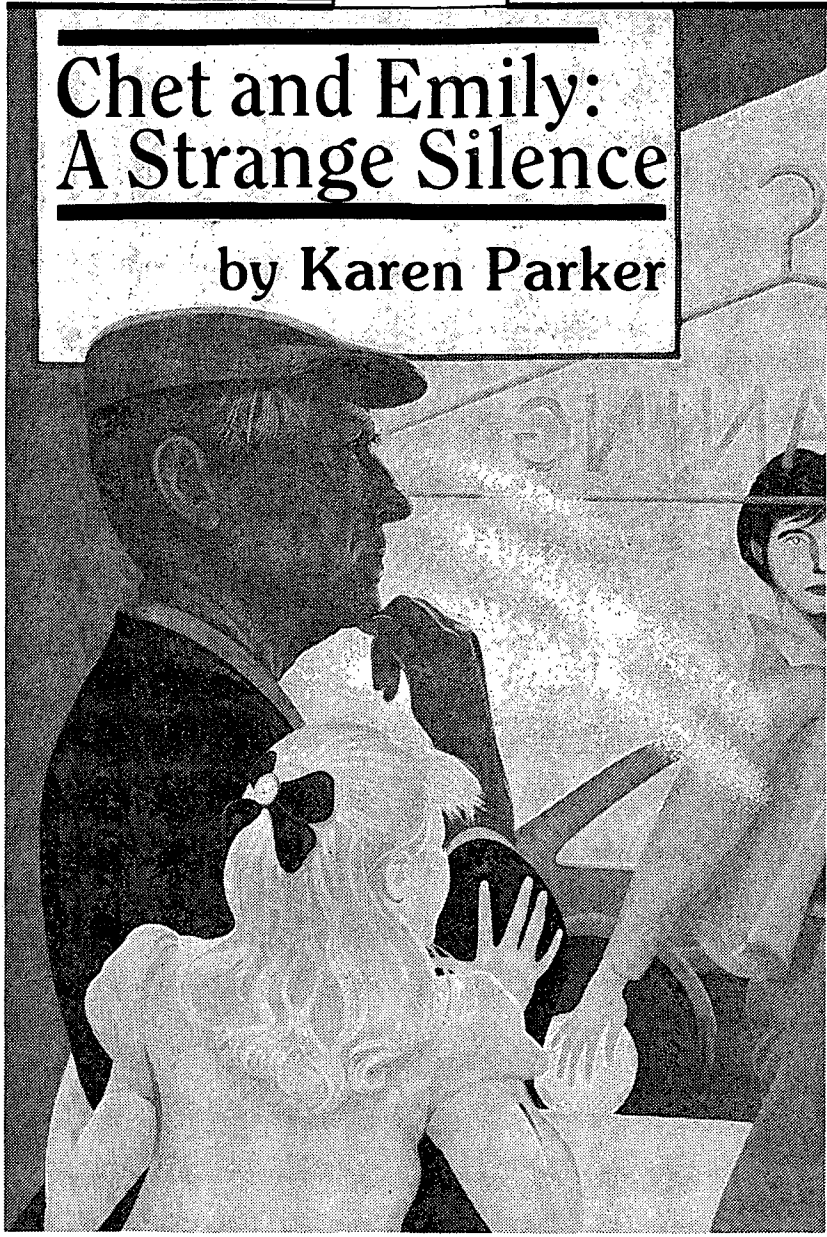


Illustration by Mark Fresh

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Chet had wandered the entire house twice before he realized what he was doing. He tried to stop this aimless activity by making faces at himself in the hall mirror.

He knew what to do when Bert and Alice were home. He knew his role when Emily was around. What was stumping him now was what to do as Emily's sole caregiver while her parents were away and she was at school.

Yesterday had been no problem. He'd driven his daughter and her husband to the airport for an eight A.M. Boston flight. The wedding of Bert's niece wasn't until Saturday but they figured if they were going all that way they might as well make a long weekend out of it.

"Still want me to bring you back some Boston tea, Em?" Bert had joked at the entrance to the departure lounge.

"Oh, Dad, I was a little kid when I used to say that." Emily was still upset about not going with them. She'd never been on a plane.

"Don't *worry,* Dad," Alice told Chet as she hugged him and then pulled back before the tissue carnation corsage she was wearing got crushed. Emily had made it for her the night before and presented it to her mother in the car on the way to the airport. Emily had sprayed it with some perfume she got for her birthday, and the smell was unpleasantly dodging around Alice's stomach—she'd been too nervous to eat, she *had* been on a plane before and did not like it—but she happily wore the flower.

"I don't worry," Chet had said, and as Alice laughed he added, "Not much."

Well, it wasn't worry that was causing this stroll around the house today. He was out-of-sorts *bored.* After Emily had gone to school yesterday, he'd done the breakfast dishes and shaken his head over the rearranged but uneaten food on Alice's plate. Then he'd puttered a bit in the yard—couldn't do that today, it was raining. Then Pete Sinclair had phoned for Bert, and he and Chet had had a good chat. The afternoon had been as nicely busy. But today!

Chet leaned on the kitchen sink and stared out at the wet back yard. He pulled a sigh up from his shoes just as the side door banged open and Emily exploded into the room.

She was wild-eyed. The hood from her rain cape was down, and her hair was soaking. She wasn't wearing the boots she'd left for school in half an hour before, and her sneakers were drenched. She was gasping for air.

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Chet noticed all this as his heart and his body leaped across the kitchen. "Em—what's the matter?" he asked. "Em, what is it?"

He stripped off her cape, pulled off her shoes. She was still gasping. Then she started to shiver. He ran upstairs for one of the huge bath towels he'd bought on sale and which Alice said they'd never find a use for, they were too big. Hah.

Emily was standing where he'd left her in the kitchen, but she wasn't making those horrid gasping noises. He wrapped her in the towel, picked her up, and carried her into the living room. He sat down and began to dry her hair. She pushed the towel away from her face and shivered harder. He cuddled her to him. She pushed her face into his shoulder.

"Oh, Gramps," she said. "Oh, Gramps."

"Emily, what is the matter? Tell me."

"It's Annabelle. Oh, Gramps."

Emily said something into his shoulder.

"She's what?"

"Dead." Emily hissed out the word, pushing herself away from him and staring at him. "Dead," she said, more quietly.

Chet stared back at her and then swallowed.

"How did she die? How did you find out?"

"I found out at school. She wasn't at her desk. And Marylou said she was dead, but no one believed her. So when Mrs. Sylvester came in I asked her" (Oh, you would have to be the one, Chet thought) "and she was upset but she told us—and—I—" Emily stopped and hugged hard into Chet again "—and I asked to go to the washroom but instead I came home," she finished in a muffled voice.

"How did she die?" Chet asked into her hair.

"I don't know."

He held her and rocked her and was about to put her to bed when the phone rang. It was the school. They had missed Emily and wanted to make sure she was at home. Chet asked the secretary about Annabelle, but she said she had no information other than, yes, she had died overnight.

It took them long enough to realize Emily wasn't at school, Chet told himself after he had hung up and gone for some blankets—Emily wanted to lie on the chesterfield, not in bed. But he was awfully glad the school hadn't phoned before she got home. That would really have been upsetting. He made her a hot chocolate. He wasn't bored any more.

At lunchtime she got up and insisted on going back to school.

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"I'm not sick," she said. "And you have to write me a note."

He made her eat some soup —she still looked very drawn— then he took her the four blocks to school. "I'm driving you," he told her. "You left your boots at school, and it's still pouring."

That afternoon he saw the mother of one of Emily's classmates in the grocery store and asked her if she knew how Annabelle had died. She said she'd heard it was in her sleep. They discussed the sadness of it all.

"She was an only child, too," the woman said. Chet thought of Emily and hurried home. He made her meatballs for supper, one of her favorite dishes. She was a little quieter than usual. He did not ask about Annabelle, and she did not mention her. She and Annabelle hadn't been bosom buddies, but she had been as close a friend as Emily had ever had.

"Emily seems to have more crushes than long-term relationships," Alice had commented a year or so earlier.

"You were the same," Chet told her.

Alice looked surprised. "Was I? Hm, then it must be all right."

Chet let Emily stay up late to watch television that night. She didn't fall asleep as she usually did during past-bedtime movies. She's growing up, Chet thought.

Then she woke in the night, crying.

"I thought that movie was too adult for you," he told her as she clung to him. She didn't say anything.

He thought he heard her crying close to morning, but he fell asleep again before he could decide whether or not to get up.

Saturday was a nice day. The rain had stopped, and in the morning they went to a flea market. Chet bought a perfectly good toilet seat for two dollars—you never know when the old one might break—and stashed it down in the basement in the small room beside the furnace.

"I know why you're hiding it," Emily told him when he came back upstairs. "Because if Mom sees it, she'll say it's one more piece of junk for an overcrowded house but mostly because it's pink and you know our toilet is green."

"I'm not hiding it," he replied. "And besides, it would do in an emergency."

"Oh, Gramps!" Emily doubled over in laughter. "A toilet seat emergency!"

He was glad to hear her laugh. If she could laugh, she must be over Annabelle's death.

That night she woke up screaming. He held her and rocked her, and when she was finally calmed down, he gave

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her a drink of water.

"Are you still thinking of Annabelle?" he asked her. She jerked and almost tipped the water. The white lines that appeared from her nose to the outside of her mouth when she was most distressed stood out on her face.

"No," she protested and turned back into her sheets. There was nothing he could do. He went back to bed.

In the morning she looked tired. He felt hopeless. He couldn't wait until Alice and Bert got home, but they weren't coming until Monday.

At noon the telephone rang while he and Emily were playing a game of crazy eights at the kitchen table. Emily got up and went into the living room to answer it.

After a pause he heard her say, "Well, there is a Mr. Carmichael here, but his name isn't Chester."

Chet quickstepped it to the door of the living room. She hadn't hung up the phone. "Yes, he's my grandfather," she was saying.

He took the phone from her. "My name is Chester," he said to Emily before speaking into the phone. She looked at him in astonishment and then went and curled up on the recliner.

"Chester Carmichael speaking," he said.

"Oh, Mr. Carmichael, you probably won't remember me at all, it's been almost thirty years, but you taught me in eighth grade. I used to be Gertrude McKenzie then." She paused and he experienced a moment of panic as countless nameless faces passed through his mind. He hadn't taught school in more than twenty years—he had loved the actual teaching, but all the rest finally got to him long before his retirement came up and he'd gone on to other things.

"We used to have wonderful discussions about life and feelings," this Gertrude Whoever was saying, hesitantly, perhaps a bit regretfully at having risked phoning. "At least I thought they were great. You might have—"

"Of course! Gertrude! Yes, I do remember. I remember our talks very well." And he did too. "You were the most restful child. Interesting but restful."

"Well, thank you," she said with a laugh but not a great deal of surprise. He suspected that the traits he'd found in her as a young girl which were strong enough to persist in his memory across three decades had impressed others during the course of her life.

They chatted easily now—she told him where she was living, about her kids, her job, her ex-

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husband, her husband-to-be. He told her about himself, about his succession of jobs after teaching, his investments. "I seem to have a knack that way," he said.

As they talked, Chet relaxed into the stuffed chair. She'd had that effect on him way back then. He felt at such ease. Funny.

Finally she said, "Well, I was going to be in town and I knew you were here. At our twenty-fifth reunion a year ago I asked about you, and Mrs. Arbuthnot had heard you were living with your daughter." (Good God, Chet thought. Myrtle Arbuthnot was old when I taught there.) "She happened to know your daughter's name, so I looked it up and phoned."

"I'm glad you did," Chet said.

"I just wanted to thank you for those talks. They meant a lot to me then—the fact that someone took me seriously. It was sort of a crucial time of my life, I guess, and your influence made a difference."

"Well, you're welcome. And I'm touched you would make the effort to let me know. I can honestly say I enjoyed them myself." He caught sight of Emily watching him from the chair, and his worry shot back. "I have a granddaughter who's almost the age you were then—well, not quite, she's only ten, but she loves to talk as well. Not the same as you. But in her own way."

And suddenly he found himself telling this Gertrude woman about Emily and her friend who had died. He glanced at Emily. but she had closed her eyes and was rubbing her cheek along the back of the chair. "She's upset, of course," he was saying with a brave note in his voice that Gertrude immediately picked up on.

"Is she there?" she inquired. "Can she hear you talking?"

"Yes," he said, relieved.

"It must have been terrible for her. Will she talk about it?"

"No, that's the—uh—"

"Problem?"

"Yes."

"I see. Well, hopefully you can get her to talk. Bring it all out. She's likely afraid of dying herself now. When our cat died, my five-year-old refused to go to bed. Finally she told me she wouldn't mind sleeping if she didn't have to close her eyes but it was dark behind her eyes. It helped her to talk about it. We made up an image of turning on a night light when she shut her eyes."

"Is she okay now?" Chet wanted to know.

"Oh, fine. That was a few years ago. It's not easy raising kids, is it?"

Chet hadn't found raising

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Alice all that difficult—he wouldn't let himself consider that fact that Evie had done most of the child-rearing back then. If he thought about it he started to feel a sense of loss which was magnified by his being so much a part of Emily's life. "Wait until you have grandchildren," he said.

Gertrude groaned. But it was an accepting sound, not a fearful one.

A few more minutes and they'd rounded off the conversation. She said she'd call the next time she came to the city.

When he hung up Emily opened her eyes. "You never told me your name was Chester. And I never knew you were a teacher." She sounded hurt and mad.

"I was a teacher an awfully long time ago, and I guess I've done things since then that were more, well, pleasant. I had a hard time teaching." He still felt a terrible failure—the call from Gertrude should have made him feel better but it didn't, it wasn't his teaching she remembered, it was his talking. Oh well, maybe that was more important.

"Oh," said Emily. "But I thought your name was Chet."

"It is. Chet is short for Chester. Like your dad's name is short for Robert."

"But it's not the same. Robert. Chest-er. It's funny."

"Oh, I see what's bothering you. Well, some shortened names are 'funny.' Do you know what Teddy is short for?"

"No."

"Edward. And sometimes Theodore. And you know Dick is short for Richard. And Hank for Henry or Harry."

"I'm glad my name's Emily with no fooling around."

In the middle of the night she woke up screaming again, and when Chet had quieted her he sat down on the clothes hamper at the end of her bed where she stored her comics. "What's bothering you, Em?" he asked. He felt bolstered by Gertrude's call. "I wish you would tell me. Then it won't be so bad. You can't keep waking up like this. You'll get sick."

Emily's eyes were still traced with the terror of her nightmare or whatever it had been. She gulped in a shaky breath, "I'm sorry I woke you up, Gramps. But I'm fine. Go back to bed."

He wanted to be mad at her. He overexaggerated a frown as she curled down under the covers, and if she smiled he didn't know. All he could see were her wide, frightened eyes. He cursed under his breath and went back to bed.

An hour or so later he was awakened by her flinging her-

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self onto him sobbing. "Gramps! Gramps!" she cried. "She didn't just die. She was murdered!"

Chet sat up as suddenly as the burden of her clinging body would allow. "What?" he asked, sleep still fogging him.

"Annabelle was murdered. Her mother did it."

"Oh, Emily," Chet began, startled, rejecting the information.

But the words were pouring from Emily and his tone did not deter her.

"She was. I know. She told me her mother hates her and awhile ago she tried to push her down the cellar steps—she pretended she tripped and pushed Annabelle—but Annabelle grabbed the bannister and she's been afraid ever since. She couldn't tell anyone. She only told me because we were playing Truth and then she wouldn't talk about it again, but I know she was scared because she wouldn't go home if only her mother was there. And now she's dead."

She cried into his shoulder and he just let her cry. He had no idea what to say.

After a while she stopped crying. He walked her back to her room.

"There's nothing we can do in any case. If she was killed—and, Emily, I don't really think she was, lots of kids think their parents hate them—well, the police will find out. Gordie's mom told me Annabelle died in her sleep." He swallowed as he said this—he was tucking her into bed—but she didn't seem to be fearful of the connection.

"Maybe she was poisoned," Emily whispered.

"I don't think you die of poison in your sleep. Usually it's natural causes. Maybe Annabelle was sick. Or maybe she had a bad heart."

Emily sighed and gave his hand a squeeze. "Night, Gramps."

She did not wake up again that night. Chet hoped it was all over.

Alice and Bert came home the next day. Chet went and got them at the airport, and they were back when Emily returned from school.

They were full of news and had gifts, and it wasn't until supper that Emily told them about Annabelle.

"Oh, honey, how awful," Alice said.

"She smothered, somehow. Marylou told me," Emily said in a matter-of-fact voice, but her eyes looked a question at Chet.

"Sounds like crib death," Bert was saying, "But it's not called that when you're older. Apnee or something like that. You just stop breathing." He took a deep breath.

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Chet had a chance to tell Alice and Bert about Emily's feelings regarding Annabelle's death after Emily was in bed, but he didn't. Maybe it was the same as when he had a problem and worked it out on his own and then it was over with. If he shared it with other people, he had to go back and tell them it was all right and how and why. It seemed to prolong the upset. Perhaps he preferred his crises as insular as possible. Arrogant bugger, he told himself.

Emily did not wake up in the night, and Chet gave himself a bit of a pat on the back. Glad I didn't involve Alice and Bert, he thought.

But by the end of the week he became aware that Emily was not at all herself again. On Wednesday he realized that she came home from school a different way, a longer route, one that did not go by Annabelle's house.

On Saturday morning he was walking along Queen Street with Emily when she suddenly turned into the drycleaning store across from the park. He followed her, but she just stood inside the door staring at a row of plastic covered clothes. "What is it?" he asked her, but she just shook her head and he caught the end of a sentence from a lady at the counter, " . . . the mother of that girl who died. Poor woman." He turned and saw she was speaking to a customer and they were both looking out the window at a woman who was passing.

"Was that Annabelle's mother?" he asked Emily when they were back on the sidewalk again. She nodded but didn't say anything. He'd seen the woman pass on the street quite regularly. He had a notion that she visited a house just up the block from them, he seemed to remember seeing her go into it or stand on the sidewalk talking. And once again he was struck by the fleeting impressions one got in cities. In a small town he would have known for sure if she came onto his block, his territory.

On Sunday morning Emily looked tired. "You coming down with something, Em?" Alice asked her at breakfast.

"No," she said. Chet wondered if he should tell Alice what it likely was. Ask what they should do. But he didn't.

On Monday Emily looked even whiter. She picked at her breakfast.

"Get out and play—it's going to be a nice day," Alice said after she felt Emily's forehead. "I'm glad it's a PD day—you look awful. Are you sure you're feeling okay?"

"Gee, thanks, Mom," Emily said.

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"Well, maybe fresh air will help. I've got a busy day. Thanks for lending me your car, Dad. It'll make the trip shorter to pick up the drapes. Then I've got to visit Mrs. Bristow. Her daughter says she really seems to perk up when I drop by."

"So I won't make you lunch then?" Chet asked.

"No, I'll pick up something in the mall."

"Any excuse to indulge in those bo bo balls, eh," Bert teased as he went out the door. "See you all tonight."

Emily got her heavy sweater after Alice left and went outdoors. Chet watched her amble down the walk, all the spring gone from her step. She turned along the sidewalk and went toward the park.

Maybe she'll come across some friends and have some fun, he thought.

He stood looking out the window until she was out of sight. Then he stared across the street, trying to decide about a winter vacation. He'd wait to see if one of the houses he partly owned sold in the next month or so. He was all for waiting for a better market, but Smitty wanted out. Chet had considered buying his share. But then he'd have to mortgage the Fenson building.

As he was indulging in these pleasant speculations the garbage truck passed by and the can got emptied. Chet went out to collect it. At the road he looked along the way Emily had gone, but she was nowhere in sight. From the other way along the street Annabelle's mother was coming toward him. He made a quick decision. He waited until she came near.

"You're Annabelle's mom, aren't you?" he asked. "I'm Chet Carmichael, Emily's grandfather. Emily and Annabelle were friends."

She was an attractive woman, square of body and face. Her hair cupped her face like an inverted heart. "I'm Juanita Tavistock." She extended her hand more in a droop than a shake, but Chet grasped it anyway.

"I'm sorry, well, about Annabelle," he said.

She inclined her head slightly but did not say anything. He felt he was dealing with a perfectly polite person who was either a born Victorian or had unusual training. If she'd shown distress, he would have turned to his task and let her walk on. But she was so calm. He had some wish to ease her hidden sorrow. Instead he chose to share some of his own.

"Could I talk to you?" he asked. She stared at him. "It's about Emily. She's really upset."

He indicated the path to the house with a nod of his head.

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She inclined her head again. "Of course," she said and glided stiffly up the front walk. She held herself so upright she gave the illusion of great height although her head was level with Chet's.

"No one's home," he said, taking the lead once they were in the house and going toward the kitchen. "Could I pour you a cup of coffee? Or I'll make fresh."

"No, that's fine. I haven't much time." She sat at the table and crossed her hands in front of her. Chet noticed that her arms were resting on leftover breakfast crumbs, but she didn't seem to mind.

"I won't keep you." He sat to the right of her in Alice's place. He scratched his chin. What the hell am I going to do now, he asked himself. He stalled, "Annabelle was your only child, wasn't she?"

"Yes," she answered after a short pause. She slowly and quietly took a deep breath. It seemed a difficult endeavor.

Chet was sweating. He wanted desperately to get out of this. I'll just tell her Emily's really upset to lose a friend, he thought. He found himself saying, "Emily's got a bee in her bonnet. She seems to think Annabelle was—well—" He had been staring down at his own hands on the table, his left thumb rubbing along the joint in his right one where the arthritis flared, his voice trying for an almost jocular note to lighten the implication of his words. Suddenly Juanita Tavistock pulled her hands off the table and sat on them, one on each side of her thighs.

Startled, Chet looked over at her.

"Annabelle was what?" she said in the coldest, deadest voice he had ever heard. But she had put her head at that polite angle again and was looking down at the table.

"Oh, well, scared," Chet apologized.

Everything shifted. The weird voice changed to one of casual conversation. "Really? How silly. What would Annabelle have to be afraid of?" she was saying as she raised her gaze to Chet, and he thought he heard something snap. Perhaps her teeth cracked together. Her eyes were totally mad. He'd seen this once in a horror film, the maniacal look. He'd thought it a marvelous special effect. He'd never expected to see it in real life.

Chet pushed himself involuntarily back in the chair and she leaped forward, her hands flailing out in a wide circle from under her to come together around his neck as the chatty voice went on. "She had nothing to be afraid of. I was afraid

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of her. It was her fault. I only realized it a short while ago. She was the reason I couldn't have more children. Seven miscarriages in six years. She'd cursed my womb."

Chet was struggling to pull the hands away from his neck that were slowly, unemotionally choking him. He could not budge her fingers. His feet were kicking out, but she seemed not to feel the blows. He was making horrible noises while she went on calmly talking. "So I had to get rid of her." Suddenly there was blood. Chet had clawed her face. "Now I can have more babies. Lots of lovely babies."

There was screaming somewhere now. Chet was falling into blackness. Then the pressure on his throat ceased and the screeching increased, and before he slid into unconsciousness, he felt Emily throw herself on him.

He came to once or twice in the ambulance, but it wasn't real.

"I've never seen such a savage attack. She's not a very large woman," the doctor was saying as she worked on Chet in the emergency room. She patted his shoulder. "I'm going to give you something to make you sleep for awhile. Your system, your throat especially, needs a rest."

The room was dim when he awoke, and he cried a bit as Alice hugged him and then Bert came in and a policeman and a bossy nurse. He finally got to ask about Emily.

"She's fine, Dad. I told you over and over before they put you to sleep."

"I want to see her," he croaked.

"Wait until tomorrow. She's fine." Alice smoothed the blanket over his feet.

He suddenly felt very frightened. "She's not all right," he almost shouted and then coughed and swallowed and coughed again. "She's hurt. You're not telling me."

The nurse rushed in from the bathroom where she was rinsing out a cloth to put on his throat. "Don't—please don't upset yourself, Mr. Carmichael."

"Dad, for God's sake," Alice pleaded. "She's fine, really she is."

"I want to see her."

The nurse shrugged. She looked at Bert. "I'll let you bring her in if he'll promise to calm down."

Chet produced an immediate calm. Out of some distant memory he suddenly could hear his mother saying, "Chester can contain himself if he wants to." Funny thing, the mind.

While Bert was gone Alice patted Chet's hand, a monotonous rhythm. It felt soothing.

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Bert opened the door and let Emily in ahead of him. Her eyes were huge and tear-scarred. She stared at her grandfather. She looked at the cloth around his neck. She looked into his eyes.

He held out his arms to her and she slowly walked across the room.

"Lift her to me," he whispered, and Alice started to but Bert came across and picked Emily up and set her on the bed. Chet's eyes filled with tears. Emily looked back, dry-eyed.

He pulled her to him, snuggling her head into his shoulder. She felt wooden. Bert stood by the window looking out, his fingers idly touching the rough fabric of the drapes. Alice sat in the chair by the bed.

Chet rubbed his hand along the tight strings at the back of Emily's neck.

"I'm okay, Gramps," she said.

He knew she wasn't. He was overwhelmed by her reassurance.

He thought for a bit. Then he started to talk. "A couple of weeks ago I got chatting with a man in the bank—the day you were at the dentist. I never told you, I guess." Chet's voice was raspy and Bert turned his head to look at him curiously, then stared out the window again. "He got to talking to me about his dog for some reason. He said a car had run over it. The dog might have been at fault—it might have run into the street. Or the driver might have been going too fast. Whatever the reason, the dog was killed."

He stopped and looked toward Alice and moved his head slightly toward the water glass on the bedside stand. Emily had relaxed slightly into him and he did not want to move.

Alice stood up and held the glass to his lips. He drank and held Emily tighter. "Thanks, Al. Now, as I was saying, this man said his dog got killed but he told himself it was only a dog, not to make a big thing of it."

He shifted slightly. Emily's weight was hurting his shoulder and he eased the position. She was listening easily now. She looked up at him.

"This lasted for about a week. Then he found he wasn't feeling well. He wasn't hungry. He couldn't sleep properly. And he realized he missed the dog. It didn't matter that it was only an animal. It was his feelings he was trying to keep inside, and they were hurting to get out."

Emily had become very still again. Chet cleared his throat. "Annabelle's mother is sick, Emily. You were right. She did kill Annabelle." Bert looked over at him and frowned and

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Alice raised her hand toward him, but he stopped them both with a look. He swallowed the nausea he felt in his throat at the thought of a mother destroying her own child.

"And you saw her hurting me and you hit her with that brass thing and likely saved my life. I can never thank you enough for that. But it wasn't nice and you're allowed to be scared and angry and whatever else you're feeling. You're allowed, Em. It's okay."

She gave one convulsive shudder and for a second or two went completely still. Chet thought she had fainted, but as he twisted forward to look into her face, she suddenly turned around to him and reached up a hand to touch his bruised and aching throat. Her face dissolved. She opened her mouth but no words came out. The tears poured out of her eyes. And her body shook with sobbing.

Alice stood up and pulled Emily to her. Emily wrapped herself into her mother.

Chet lay back on the pillow and stared at the wall.

SOLUTION TO THE JUNE "UNSOLVED":

1. Jack, the pool hustler, at the library of his pocket billiards.
2. John, the author, at the Capitol of his pocketbook.
3. Jason, the baker, at the pool hall of his pocket bread.
4. Jim, the Boy Scout, at the bakery of his pocketknife.
5. Jerry, the politician, at the campfire of his pocket veto.

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MYSTERY CLASSIC

Stan the Killer

by Georges Simenon



Illustration by Hank Blaustein

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Maigret puffed at his pipe as he walked along slowly, hands clasped behind his back. It was not a simple matter to push his heavy body through the morning mob on Rue Saint Antoine, where a bright sun poured down on carts and baskets of fruits and vegetables, blocking almost the entire width of the sidewalk.

It was marketing time—the time for feeling artichokes and tasting cherries, the time for scallops and chops to take turns in the scales.

"Fine asparagus, five francs a bundle!"

"Get your fresh whiting, just come in!"

Clerks in white aprons, butchers in fine checks; the smell of cheese from a dairy shop and farther off a whiff of roasting coffee; the ping of cash registers and the rumble of a bus; the distrustful glances of housewives—all the agitated business of alimentation . . . and in the midst of it the slow heavy progress of Maigret, on one of his most tormenting cases.

Across from Rue de Birague there's a little cafe, with a scant three tables in front of it, called the Barrel of Burgundy. There Maigret settled himself, like any other weary passerby. He did not even look up at the tall thin waiter who came for his order. "Small white Macon," he muttered—and who was to guess that this occasionally inept new waiter at the Barrel of Burgundy was otherwise known as Detective Janvier?

The waiter returned with the wine precariously balanced on a tray. He wiped the table with a questionable cloth, and was even so clumsy as to drop a scrap of paper on the floor. Maigret picked it up as he left, and read:

The woman's gone out marketing. No sign of One-Eye. The Beard left early. The three others must be still in the hotel.

At ten in the morning the crowd was getting even worse. Next to the Barrel a grocery was having a sale and barkers kept entreating the passersby to sample cookies at two francs a box.

At the corner of Rue de Birague you could see the sign of a dingy hotel, "Rooms by the month, the week or the day. Payment in advance." With doubtless intentional irony this rattrap had chosen to call itself the Beausejour.

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Maigret sipped at his light dry wine and stared apparently aimlessly at the teeming crowd in the spring sun. But his gaze soon settled on a window in the second floor of a house on Rue de Birague opposite the hotel. At that window a little old man sat by a canary's cage and seemed to have no interest in life but to bask in the sun as long as the Lord should deign to leave him alive.

And this old gentleman, who took no notice of Maigret, was Sergeant Lucas, deftly aged some twenty years.

All this constituted a state of siege that is more vulgarly known to the police as a stakeout. It had lasted six days, and at least twice a day the inspector came around for the latest news. At night his men were relieved by a patrolman who was actually a detective from the Police Judiciaire, and a streetwalker who contrived to walk the streets without ever picking up a customer.

Maigret would have Lucas's report in a moment, by telephone; it would undoubtedly be no more sensational than Janvier's.

The crowd shoved by so close to the tiny terrace of the Barrel of Burgundy that Maigret found himself constantly obliged to pull his legs back under his chair. And now, as he made one of these shifts, he suddenly realized that a man had sat down unnoticed at the same table. He was a little man, with red hair and sad eyes, whose mournful face had something of the clown about it.

"You again?" the inspector grunted.

"I beg you to forgive me, Monsieur Maigrette, but I am certain that you will eventually come to understand me and to accept the proposition that—" He broke off to say to the waiterly Janvier, "The same as my friend."

He had an extremely marked Polish accent. He presumably suffered from throat trouble; he constantly chewed at a "cigar" impregnated with creosote, which emphasized the clownishness of his appearance.

"You're getting on my nerves!" Maigret burst out. "Will you kindly tell me how you knew I'd come here this morning?"

"I did not know."

"Then why are you here? Are you going to try to convince me that this is an accidental meeting?"

"No."

The little man's reflexes were as leisurely as those of the slow-motion acrobats in vaudeville. His yellow eyes gazed around him, staring into emptiness. He spoke in a sad voice, unvarying in pitch, as though perpetually offering condolences.

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"You are not nice to me, Monsieur Maigrette."

"That isn't answering my question. How do you happen to be here this morning?"

"I followed you."

"From Headquarters?"

"Long before that. From your home."

"So you admit you're spying on me?"

"I am not spying on you, Monsieur Maigrette. I have far too much respect and admiration for you! I have already stated to you that I shall one day be your collaborator. . . . "

And he sighed nostalgically, contemplating the artificial ash of painted wood that tipped his creosote cigar.

There'd been nothing about it in any of the papers save one; and that one, which got the tip the Lord knows where, uniquely complicated the inspector's task.

The police have reason to believe that the Polish bandits, including Stan the Killer, are at this moment in Paris.

It was true enough, but silence would have been more helpful.

In four years a gang of unknown Poles had attacked five farms, always in the north of France, always with the same methods.

In each case it was an isolated farm run by elderly people. The crime invariably took place the night of a market day, and the chosen victims were always those who had sold a good number of fowls and animals and had a large sum of cash on hand.

Nothing scientific about the procedure. Brutal attack, as in the days of the highway robbers. Absolute contempt for human life. These Poles were killers. They killed every human being they found on the farm, even down to the children; it was the one way of making sure that they could never be identified.

Were there two of them? Or five or eight?

In every case neighbors had noticed a small truck. One twelve-year-old claimed that he had seen a one-eyed man. Some asserted that the bandits wore black masks.

Whatever the facts, one thing was certain: Every inhabitant of each farm had had his throat sliced.

This was no business of the Paris police. This was up to the mobile units in the provinces, who worked on it for two years without remotely clarifying the mystery—a failure that did not reassure the countryside.

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Then a report came in from Lille, where whole villages are Polish enclaves in French territory. The report was vague enough; it was impossible even to establish its ultimate source.

"The Poles say that this is Stan the Killer's gang. . . ."

But when the police tried to question the coal miners one by one, the men had never heard of it, or muttered, "Well, they told me . . ."

"Who's 'they'?"

"I don't know. I forget . . ."

Then came the crime near Rheims. There the gang overlooked a servant girl sleeping in the attic, who became the first survivor. She had heard the murderers talking in a language she thought was Polish. She had seen their masks through a hole in the boards; and had noticed that one of the men had only one eye and that another, a giant of a man, was extraordinarily hairy.

And so the police had come to refer to them as "Stan the Killer," "The Beard," and "One-Eye."

For months nothing more turned up, until a detective on the hotel squad made a discovery. His territory was the Saint Antoine district, which teems with Poles. And in a hotel on Rue de Birague he observed a suspicious group that included a one-eyed man and a giant whose face was literally covered with hair.

They were seemingly poor people. The bearded giant and his wife rented a room by the week, but almost every night they gave shelter to several compatriots, sometimes two, sometimes as many as five, and often other Poles rented the adjoining room.

"You want to take this over, Maigret?" the director of the Police Judiciaire suggested.

Everything was strictly hush-hush—and so the next day one newspaper printed the story. The day after that Maigret found a letter in his mail—clumsily written in an almost childish hand, full of misspellings, on the cheap sort of paper sold in grocery stores:

You won't ever get Stan. Look out. Before you can take him, he'll have time to kill off plenty more.

The letter was no hoax, Maigret was certain; it *felt* right. It had a filthy aftertaste of the underworld.

"Be careful," the chief recommended. "Don't rush into an arrest. The man who's cut sixteen throats in four years won't hesitate to

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scatter a few bullets around him when he sees he's done for."

Which was why Janvier had become a waiter and Lucas a basking old man.

The noisy life of the quarter went on with no suspicion that a desperate man might at any moment start firing in all directions. . . .

And then Michael Ozep appeared.

His first meeting with Maigret had been four days ago. He had arrived at Headquarters and insisted on seeing the inspector personally. Maigret had let him wait a good two hours, but the little man was undaunted. He entered the office, clicked his heels, bowed, and extended his hand:

"Michael Ozep, former officer in the Polish army, now professor of gymnastics in Paris—"

"Sit down. I'm listening."

The Pole spoke so volubly and with so pronounced an accent that it was sometimes impossible to follow him. He explained that he came of very good family, that he had been forced to leave Poland because of unmentionably intimate misfortunes (he allowed his listener to gather that he had been in love with his colonel's wife), and that he had now sunk to worse depths of despair than ever because he could not accustom himself to leading a mediocre life.

"You understand, Monsieur Maigrette . . . " (it was impossible to wean him from that pronunciation) " . . . I am a gentleman. Here I am forced to give lessons to individuals of no culture and no education. I am a poor man . . . I have decided to commit suicide."

A nut . . . Maigret thought to himself. An astonishing number of the unbalanced feel the need of confiding their problems to the police; he was used to such visits.

"I tried it three weeks ago. I threw myself into the Seine from the Austerlitz Bridge, but the river squad saw me and pulled me out."

Maigret invented a pretext to step into the next office and phone the river squad. The story was true.

"Six days later I tried to kill myself with gas, but the postman came with a letter and opened the door. . . . "

A phone call to the police station in Ozep's district. And again the story was true.

"I truly *want* to kill myself, do you understand? My existence has lost all value. A gentleman cannot consent to live in poverty

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and mediocrity. Therefore I thought that you might have a need of a man like me . . . "

"For what?"

"To help you to arrest Stan the Killer."

Maigret frowned. "You know him?"

"No. I have only heard talk about him. As a Pole, I am indignant that a man of my people should so violate the laws of hospitality. I should like to see Stan and his gang arrested. I know that he is resolved to sell his life dearly. Among those who go to arrest him, some will certainly be killed. Is it not better then that it should be I, since I already desire to die? Tell me where Stan is. I shall go and disarm him. If need be, I shall wound him so that he can do no more harm."

All Maigret found himself capable of saying was the traditional formula, "Leave your address. I'll write you a letter."

Michael Ozep had a furnished room on Rue des Tournelles, not far from Rue de Birague. The report of the investigating detective was in his favor. He had indeed been a second lieutenant in the Polish army when it was organized after Poland gained her independence. Then his trail vanished. In Paris he tried to teach gymnastics to the sons and daughters of small merchants. His suicide attempts were genuine.

Nevertheless Maigret sent him, with the chief's approval, an official letter ending:

. . . . deeply regret that I cannot take advantage of your generous proposition, for which my most sincere thanks . . .

Twice since then Ozep had appeared at the Quai des Orfevres and insisted on seeing the inspector. The second time he had even refused to leave, claiming that he could wait as long as he was obliged to, and thus almost forcibly occupying, hour after hour, one of the green plush armchairs in the waiting room.

And now Ozep sat there, at Maigret's table, in front of the Barrel of Burgundy.

"I wish to prove to you, Monsieur Maigrette, that I am of some use and that you can accept my services. It is now three days that I have been following you, and I am in a position to tell you everything that you have done during that time. I know too that the waiter who just brought my wine is one of your detectives and that there is another at the window across from us, near a canary cage."

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Maigret clenched the bit of his pipe furiously between his teeth and kept his eyes turned away from the Pole, who kept on and on in his monotonous voice:

"I understand that when a strange man comes to you and says, 'I am a former officer of the Polish army and I wish to kill myself'—I understand why you would think, 'This may not be true.' But you have verified everything that I have told you. You have seen that I do not stoop to lies. . . . "

He was a mill grinding out words, rapidly, jerkily. It wore Maigret out merely to listen to him, especially since the accent so distorted each syllable that Maigret had to concentrate to follow the sense.

"You are not a Pole, Monsieur Maigrette. You do not speak the language; you do not comprehend the mentality. I earnestly desire to help you; for I cannot see the good name of my native land tarnished by . . . "

The inspector was beginning to choke with anger. The former second lieutenant could hardly fail to observe the fact, but he continued nevertheless:

"If you try to capture Stan, what will he do? He has maybe two, maybe three, revolvers in his pockets. He fires at everybody. Who knows how many ladies he wounds? How many little babies he kills? Then people will say that the police—"

"Will you shut up?"

"Now as for me, I am resolved to die. No one will weep for poor Ozep. You say to me, 'There is Stan!' And I follow him as I have followed you. I wait for the moment when there is no one near us and I say, 'You are Stan the Killer!' Then he fires at me and I shoot him in the leg. By the fact that he shoots me, you have your proof that he is Stan and you are not making a blunder. And since he is crippled by my shot . . . "

There was no stopping him. He would have gone on in spite of the entire universe.

"Supposing I have you arrested?" Maigret broke in crudely.

"Why?"

"To get a little peace!"

"What would you say? What has poor Ozep done in violation of the laws of France, which he wishes only to defend and for which he is offering up his life?"

"Stuff it!"

"I beg your pardon? Are you agreeing?"

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"Not in the least."

At that moment a woman went by, a woman with blonde hair and clear complexion, recognizably a foreigner. She was carrying a shopping bag and was headed for a butcher shop.

Maigret was following her with his eyes when he noticed that his companion had suddenly set to mopping his brow with an enormous handkerchief that all but swallowed up his small-featured face.

"This is the mistress of Stan, is it not?" Ozep asked.

"Will you leave me alone?"

"You have convinced yourself that this is the mistress of Stan, but you do not know which one is Stan. You think it is the one with the beard. Now the bearded one is called Boris. And the man with one eye is Sasha. He is not a Pole, but a Russian. If you should investigate them yourself you will learn nothing. In the hotel there are only Poles; they will refuse to answer or they will lie to you. Whereas I . . . "

No housewife shopping in the confusion of Rue Saint Antoine could suspect the subjects being discussed on the tiny terrace of the Barrel of Burgundy. The blonde foreigner was buying chops at a nearby butcher's stall; in her eyes there was something of that same lassitude that lay in the eyes of Michael Ozep.

"Perhaps you are angry with me because you fear that you may be called to account if I am killed? In the first place, I have no family. In the second place, I have written a letter in which I state that I alone, and purely of my own volition, have sought this death. . . ."

Poor Janvier stood on the threshold trying to figure out a way of telling Maigret that there was a telephone message for him. Maigret noticed the ambiguous pantomime, but went on watching the Pole and puffing forth little clouds of pipe smoke.

"Listen, Ozep."

"Yes, Monsieur Maigrette?"

"If you're seen again anywhere around Rue Saint Antoine, I'll have you arrested!"

"But I live only—"

"You'd better move."

"You are refusing this offer which I—"

"Get out!"

"But—"

"Get out, or I'll arrest you here and now!"

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The little man rose, clicked his heels, bowed almost double, and executed a dignified retreat. Maigret had noticed one of his detectives nearby; now he signaled the man to follow the peculiar professor of gymnastics.

At last Janvier could deliver his message. "Lucas just phoned. He's spotted that they have guns in the room. Five Poles slept in the next room last night, leaving the door open between. Some of them had to sleep on the floor. Who the devil was that character you were talking to?"

"Nothing . . . How much?"

Janvier slipped back into character, pointing at Ozep's glass. "You're paying monsieur's check? One franc twenty and one twenty makes two forty."

Maigret took a taxi to Headquarters. At the door of his office he found the detective who had set out after Ozep.

"You lost him?" he roared. "Aren't you ashamed of yourself? I give you the most childish job of shadowing and you—"

"I didn't lose him," the detective murmured humbly.

"Where is he?"

"Here."

"You pulled him in?"

"He pulled me."

For Ozep had, indeed, headed directly for Headquarters, where he had placidly installed himself and his sandwich in the waiting room, after announcing that he had an appointment with Inspector "Maigrette."

There're no kudos in paperwork, but there may be the solution of a case.

Unwillingly, irritatedly, Maigret was adding up in one report in his own large handwriting the various information obtained in the two weeks' siege of the Polish gang.

When he set down the facts in order, he could see even more easily how very little they had learned. They did not even know precisely how many individuals belonged to the gang. The earlier reports, from the people who had seen or thought they had seen the bandits near the time of the attacks, stated that there were four of them, sometimes five. It was probable that they had other accomplices, who cased the farms and markets beforehand. That brought the number to six or seven, which seemed to correspond

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roughly with the number who hung around the nucleus on Rue de Birague.

There were only three regular tenants, all of whom had filled out their cards according to regulations and displayed passports in perfect order:

1. Boris Saft, the one the police called The Beard, who seemed to live as man and wife with the pale blonde.
2. Olga Tzerewski, 28, born in Vilna.
3. Sasha Vonontsov, known as One-Eye.

Boris the Beard and Olga occupied one room, Sasha One-Eye the next; the door between was always left open.

The young woman did the shopping every morning and cooked the meals on an alcohol stove.

The Beard rarely went out, but spent most of his days stretched on the iron bedstead, reading Polish newspapers that he had one of the gang buy for him at the newspaper kiosk in Place de la Bastille. Once the errand boy brought back an American detective magazine in addition to the Polish periodicals. They all read that.

One-Eye went out often, always followed by one of Maigret's detectives. A fact of which he was probably aware, since he never did more than take long walks through Paris, stopping in many bars but never speaking to a soul.

As for the rest, they were what Lucas called "the floating population." People came and went, always the same lot, four or five of them. Olga fed them, and sometimes they slept on the floor overnight. There was nothing odd about this; it happens in all hotels with poor tenants—exiles who get together to rent a room and then put up any of their compatriots they come across.

On the floating population Maigret had a few notes:

1. The Chemist, so called because he had twice visited the Work Exchange to apply for a job in a chemical plant. His clothes were badly worn but rather well cut. For hours he would wander around the streets of Paris like a man looking for any way to earn a little money, and once, for a whole day, he was employed as a sandwich man.

2. Spinach, named after the implausible spinach-green hat that seemed even more unlikely in view of his faded pink shirt. Spinach went out particularly in the evenings, when he picked up tips opening car doors in front of the Montmartre bars.

3. Puffy, a fat, wheezy little man, better dressed than the others even if his shoes were not mates.

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And there were two others who visited the hotel less regularly; it was hard to say if they belonged to the gang.

Maigret stared at the notes with the exasperated feeling that the most important detail was somehow eluding him. Finally, he picked up his pen again and wrote: "These people give the impression of penniless foreigners, looking for any kind of work at all. But there's always vodka in the rooms, and sometimes impressive spreads of food. Maybe the gang knows it's being watched, and is putting on an act for the police. If one of them is Stan the Killer, it is probably either The Beard or One-Eye. But this is only guesswork."

It was without the least enthusiasm that he took his report to the chief.

"Nothing new?"

"Nothing specific. I'd swear the devils have spotted one of our men and are just amusing themselves seeing how often they can come in and go out on innocent errands. They know we can't keep a large section of the force mobilized on their account forever. Time's on their side; they have lots of it. . . ."

"You have a plan?"

"Look, chief. You know that ideas and I haven't been on speaking terms for a long time. I come and I go and I sniff around. You'll hear people say I'm waiting for inspiration; they're way off the track. What I'm waiting for is the one significant happening that never fails to turn up. The whole thing is being there when it does turn up so that I can take advantage of it."

"So you're waiting for a . . . happening?" the chief smiled. He knew his man.

"This much I'm convinced of: This *is* the Polish gang. Because of that fool of an informer who keeps hanging around here picking up scraps of conversation, they're on their guard. Now what I want to know is, why did Stan write to me? Maybe because he knows the police always hesitate to make a forcible arrest. More probably out of sheer bravado. These killers have their pride—you might almost say, professional pride. But which of them is Stan? And why that nickname? It's more American than Polish.

"You know how I take my time before I reach any conclusions. Well, it's beginning to come . . . The last two or three days I've begun to get the feel of the psychology of these boys. Very different from French murderers.

"They need money, not to retire to the country, or to have a fling

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in the night spots, or to clear out to foreign parts—but just simply to live their own lives, which to them means doing nothing—eating, drinking, sleeping, spending your days stretched out on a bed, smoking cigarettes, and killing bottles of vodka. And they have this longing to be together—to dream together, gossip together, some nights sing together.

"The way I see it, after their first crime they lived like this until the money ran out; then they got ready for another job. Whenever the funds are low, they start in again, coldly, without remorse, without a trace of pity for the old people whose throats they cut—and whose life's savings they eat up in a few weeks or months . . . And now that I've got the feel of it, I'm waiting—"

"I know. For the happening . . . " the director smiled.

"Joke about it all you want. Just the same the happening may be here already."

"Where?"

"In the waiting room. The little man who calls me Maigrette and who wants at all costs to help in the arrest, even if it costs him his skin. He claims it's just another method of suicide."

"A crackpot?"

"Could be. Or an accomplice of Stan's who's using this method of keeping in touch with what we're doing. Any hypothesis fits; that's what makes my character with the creosote cigar so fascinating."

Maigret emptied his pipe by tapping it gently on the window ledge, so that the ashes fell somewhere on the Quai des Orfevres, perhaps on the hat of a passerby.

"He bothers me, that little man," he added. "I've seen his face somewhere. It's not in our files, but I've seen it. And I've seen the girl, too, the blonde; she's worth remembering. None of the others. Just those two."

The director of the Police Judiciaire leaned forward. "We've been going on the assumption that the blonde is Stan's mistress. You associate her and the little man. You see the possible implications?"

"That my little man is Stan himself? Could be."

"Are you going to accept this man's offer?"

"I think so." The inspector headed for the door. He felt that he'd said enough. "You'll see, chief. I'll be amazed if we still need the stakeout by the end of this week."

And this was Thursday afternoon.

* * *

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"Sit down! Doesn't it get on your nerves to suck at that filthy creosote cigar all day?"

"No, Monsieur Maigrette."

"That 'Maigrette' of yours is beginning to get me . . . But anyway, let's get down to business. Are you still set on dying?"

"Yes, Monsieur Maigrette."

"And you still want to be entrusted with a perilous mission?"

"I wish to help you to arrest Stan the Killer."

"So if I told you to go up to One-Eye and fire a bullet into his leg, you'd do it?"

"Yes, Monsieur Maigrette. But you would first have to give me a revolver. I am a poor man and—"

"Now suppose I tell you to go to The Beard or One-Eye and say that you have important information—that the police are coming to arrest them?"

"Gladly, Monsieur Maigrette. I shall wait until One-Eye passes by in the street and then I shall perform my commission."

The lowering gaze of the inspector had no effect on the little Pole. Rarely had Maigret seen a man who combined such self-assurance with such utter serenity. Michael Ozep spoke of killing himself or of visiting the Polish gang as simply, as naturally, as he might refer to brushing his teeth. He was as much at ease in police headquarters as in the Barrel of Burgundy.

"You've never met either of them?"

"No, Monsieur Maigrette."

"All right. I'm going to give you the job. And if there's any trouble, it's on your head." Maigret lowered his eyelids to conceal his too sharp interest in the other's reaction. "In a minute we'll go together to Rue Saint Antoine. I'll wait for you outside. You'll go up to the room, picking a time when the woman is there alone. You'll tell her you're a fellow Pole and you happened by chance to learn that the police are raiding the hotel tonight. . . ."

Ozep said nothing.

"You understand?"

"Yes."

"It's all set?"

"I must confess something to you, Monsieur Maigrette . . . "

"You're turning yellow?"

"Yellow? I do not under—ah! yes. No, I am not turning yellow. But I should prefer to arrange the matter in a different way. You may think that I am taking much upon myself . . . is that how I

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say it? But I am a timid man with the ladies. And the ladies are intelligent, far more intelligent than we men. Therefore, she will see that I am lying. And because I know that she will see that I am lying, I shall blush. And when I blush . . . "

Maigret sat motionless, absorbing this unlikely explanation.

"I should prefer to talk to a man. To the one with the beard, if you like, or the one you call One-Eye, or anyone at all. . . ."

A ray of sunlight pierced slantwise through the office and lit full on Maigret's face. He seemed to be dozing, like a man whose injudiciously heavy lunch obliges him to take a siesta at his desk.

"It is exactly the same thing, Monsieur Maigrette . . . "

But Monsieur Maigrette did not answer. The only sign that he was still alive was the slim blue spiral that rose from his pipe.

"I am desolated. You can ask of me what you wish; but you demand precisely the one thing which—"

"Stuff it!"

"I beg your pardon?"

"I say, 'Stuff it!' Which means, in French, to shut up. Where did you know the woman Olga Tzerewski?"

"I?"

"Answer me!"

"I do not understand what you mean . . . "

"Answer me!"

"I do not know this woman. If I knew her, I would tell you so. I am a former officer of the Polish army and if I had not suffered misfortunes—"

"Where did you know her?"

"I swear to you, Monsieur Maigrette, by the head of my sainted mother and my poor father—"

"Where did you know her?"

"Why have you suddenly stopped being nice to me? You talk to me so brutally! To me, who came here to place myself at your disposal, to prevent Frenchmen from being murdered by a compatriot—"

"Cut the pitch!"

"Pitch?"

"Sales talk, to you. You aren't selling me."

"Ask anything of me, no matter what—"

"That's what I'm doing!"

"Ask me anything else—to throw myself under a subway train—"

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"I'm asking you to go see the woman and tell her that we'll make a raid tonight."

"You insist?"

"Take it or leave it."

"And if I refuse?"

"Then you'd better see to it that I never lay eyes on you again."

"Are you really going to arrest the gang tonight?"

"Probably."

"And you will allow me to help you?"

"Possibly. We'll see about that when you've finished your first job."

"At what time?"

"Your job?"

"No. At what time will you make the raid?"

"Let's say one in the morning."

"I am going."

"Where?"

"To find the woman."

"Just a minute! We're going together."

"It is better that I go alone. If one of them sees us, he will understand that I am assisting the police . . . "

The Pole had hardly left the office, of course, before the inspector had set a detective at his heels.

"Should I keep under cover?" the detective asked.

"No use. He's smarter than you are and he knows very well I'll have him followed."

And without losing a moment, Maigret hurried downstairs and leaped into a taxi.

"Corner of Rue de Birague and Rue Saint Antoine, as fast as you can make it!"

It was a radiant afternoon. Striped awnings lent a note of color to the shops. In their shadows dogs sprawled and napped, and all life seemed to run in slow motion. You felt that even the buses had a hard time making headway in the hot heavy air. Their wheels left tracks in the heated asphalt.

Maigret sprang out of the taxi into the house on the corner. On the second floor he opened a door without bothering to knock and found Lucas sitting at the window, still in the role of a quiet and curious elderly gentleman.

The room was shabby but clean. On the table lay the remains

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of a cold meal that Lucas had had sent up from a delicatessen.

"Anything new, inspector?"

"Anybody at home across the way?"

The room had been chosen for its strategic position; you could see straight into the two rooms of the Hotel Beausejour that the Poles occupied.

In this heat all the windows stood wide open, including the window of another room, which revealed a young girl asleep and scantily clad.

"Well, well, Lucas! Looks like you don't find your job too boring . . . "

A pair of field glasses on a chair gave evidence that Lucas attended to his work conscientiously and missed no detail, however slight.

"At the moment," said the sergeant, "there are two of them in the rooms, but there'll be only one in a minute. The man's getting dressed. He stayed in bed all morning, as usual."

"That's The Beard?"

"Yes. There were three of them for lunch: The Beard, the woman, and One-Eye. One-Eye left as soon as he'd eaten. Then The Beard got up and began to dress . . . Well! He's just put on a clean shirt. That doesn't happen very often."

Maigret came to the window to take his turn watching. The hairy giant was knotting his tie. The white shirt made an unexpected and therefore all the more dazzling splotch in the gray room.

You could see the man's lips move as he looked at himself in the mirror. Behind him the blonde woman was cleaning up, gathering gray papers and rolling them into a ball, turning off the alcohol stove, dusting the frame of a bright-colored picture on the wall.

"If only we knew what they're saying!" Lucas sighed. "There are times when it drives me crazy. I watch them talking and talking and they never stop. They wave their arms around and I can't even guess what it's all about."

"The limitless resources of the police," said Maigret dryly, "do not include a lip reader who knows Polish."

"It gets on my nerves. I'm beginning to understand the torture it must be to be deaf. I'm beginning to see why people afflicted that way are generally so cranky."

"Don't talk so much! Do you think the woman will stay there?"

"This isn't the time she usually goes out. And if she meant to go, she would have put on her gray suit."

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Olga was wearing the same dark wool dress in which she had done her marketing that morning. While she cleaned up her bohemian establishment, she kept smoking a cigarette without ever taking it from her lips, in the fashion of the true smoker who needs tobacco from morning till night.

"She never talks," Maigret observed.

"This isn't the time she does that, either. It's in the evenings that she gets to talking, when they're all gathered around her. Or a few times when she's alone with the one I call Spinach—which doesn't happen very often. Either I'm badly mistaken or she has a weakness for Spinach. He's the best-looking of the lot."

It was a strange sensation to be in an unknown room like this, to look into the lives of people and come to know their smallest gestures.

"You're getting as snoopy as a concierge, Lucas."

"That's what I'm here for, isn't it? I can even tell you that the little girl over there—the one who's sleeping so soundly—was making love last night until three in the morning with a young man with an Ascot tie who left at dawn, undoubtedly so he could get into his family's house unnoticed—Hold on! Now The Beard's leaving."

"Look at that, will you! He's practically elegant!"

"You might say so. But he looks more like a foreign wrestler than a man of the world."

"Well, let's say a wrestler who's doing good business," Maigret conceded.

No goodbye kiss across the way. The man just went—that is, he disappeared from the part of the room visible from the police observatory.

A little later he emerged onto the sidewalk and set off toward Place de la Bastille.

"Derain will pick him up," Lucas announced, sitting there like a huge spider at the center of its web. "But he knows he's being followed. He won't do anything but walk around and maybe pick up a drink somewhere."

As for the woman, she had taken a road map out of a drawer and spread it on the table.

Ozep couldn't have taken a taxi, Maigret calculated; he must have come by subway, in which case he should arrive at any moment. "*If* he's coming . . . " he corrected himself.

And he did come. They saw him arrive, hesitate, wander up and

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down the sidewalk, while the detective trailing him displayed great interest in a fish stall on Rue Saint Antoine.

Seen from above like this, the tiny Pole seemed even thinner, even more insignificant. Maigret experienced, for a moment, a pang of remorse. He could hear the poor devil's voice repeating a hundred times, in involved explanation, his famous "Monsieur Maigrette . . . "

He was hesitating; that was obvious. He seemed even to be afraid, to stare around him with a visible anguish.

"Do you know what he's looking for?" the inspector asked Lucas.

"The little pale fellow? No. Maybe some money to get into the hotel?"

"He's looking for me. He's saying to himself that I must be somewhere around and if by some miracle I've changed my mind . . . "

Too late to change now; Michael Ozep had plunged into the dark hallway of the hotel. They could follow him in their minds. He would be climbing the stairs, reaching the second floor. . . .

"He's still stalling," Maigret announced. The door should have opened before this. "He's on the landing. He's going to knock. He's knocked—look!"

The blonde girl trembled, shoved the map, with an instinctive movement, back in the dresser, and went toward the door. For a moment they could see nothing. The two were in the invisible part of the room. Then suddenly the woman appeared. Something about her had changed. Her steps were fast, decisive. She went straight to the window, closed it, then drew the dark curtains.

Lucas turned to the inspector with a quizzical smile. "Think of that!" he laughed. But his smile faded as he noticed that Maigret was far more concerned than he had expected.

"What time is it, Lucas?"

"Three ten."

"In your opinion, what are the chances that one of the gang will come back to the hotel in the next hour?"

"I doubt it. Unless, as I was telling you, Spinach, if he knows The Beard is out of the way. You don't look very happy about things."

"I don't like the way she closed that window."

"Are you afraid for your little Pole?" Maigret made no answer.

"Have you thought," Lucas went on, "that we haven't any real proof that he is in that room? It's true we saw him go into the hotel. But he might perfectly well have gone to some other room, while somebody else came—"

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Maigret shrugged his shoulders and sighed.

"What time is it, Lucas?"

"Three twenty."

"Do you know what's going to happen?"

"Do you want to go over and see what's happening across the way?"

"Not yet. But I'm probably going to make a fool of myself . . . Where can you telephone?"

"In the next room. He's a tailor who does piecework for one of the big houses, so he has to have a phone."

"Go to the tailor, then. Try not to let him listen in. Telephone the chief, and tell him I want him to send me twenty armed men at once. They're to spread a cordon around the Hotel Beausejour and wait for my signal."

Lucas's expression indicated the seriousness of this order, so out of character for Maigret, who usually laughed at police mobilization. "You think there'll be dirty work going on?"

"If it hasn't already gone on . . . "

His eyes remained fixed on the window, on the filthy glass panes, on the crimson velvet curtains of the time of Louis Philippe.

When Lucas came back from the telephone, he found the inspector still in the same place, still frowning thoughtfully.

"The boss says please be careful. There was a detective killed only last week, and now if there should be another accident—"

"Shut up, will you?"

"Do you think that Stan the Killer—"

"I don't think anything! I've thought so much about this case since this morning that I've got a headache. Now I'm satisfied just to have impressions; and if you want to know, I have the impression that some disagreeable things are happening or are about to happen. What time is it?"

"Twenty-three after."

In the neighboring room the young girl was still asleep, her mouth open, her legs bent back. Higher up, on the fifth or sixth floor, somebody was trying to play an accordion, incessantly repeating, with the same false notes, the same foxtrot refrain.

"Do you want me to go over?" Lucas suggested.

Maigret gave him a harsh look, as if his subordinate had reproached him for lack of courage. "Just what do you mean by that?"

"Nothing. I can't help seeing you're worried about what may be

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going on over there, and I thought I could go and check—"

"And you think I'd hesitate to go myself? You're forgetting one thing: Once we're over there, it's too late. If we go and find nothing, we'll never pin anything on that gang. That's why I'm hesitating . . . If only that wench hadn't closed the window!" He suddenly lifted his eyebrows. "Tell me: The other times, when she's been alone with a man, she's never closed the window, has she?"

"Never."

"Then she hadn't any suspicion of your presence here."

"She probably took me for just another foolish old man."

"So it isn't the girl who had the idea of closing the window, but the character who came in."

"Ozep?"

"Ozep or somebody else. It's the one who came in who told the girl to close the window before he showed himself."

He took his hat from the chair, emptied his pipe, scraped the bowl with his index finger.

"Where are you going, chief?"

"I'm waiting for our men to get here . . . Look! There are two of them by the bus stop. And I recognize some others in that parked taxi . . . If I stay inside five minutes without opening that window, you'll come in with our men."

"You have your gun?"

A few moments later Lucas could see Maigret crossing the street, could see Detective Janvier notice him and break off his task of wiping the tables on the terrace.

After what seemed a miraculously short interval, the window across the way opened. Maigret signaled to his sergeant to join him.

From across the street Lucas had gathered that the room was empty save for the inspector. He stumbled up a dark staircase through the stench of bad cooking and worse plumbing and entered the room, only to start back as he found the body of a woman stretched out at his feet. "Dead, of course," Maigret grunted.

It was as if the murderer had wished to leave his signature on his crime. The woman's throat had been cut, as with all the other victims of Stan. There was blood everywhere.

The bright picture on the wall turned out, on closer inspection, to be a portrait of Olga—even blonder, even more fresh-skinned than she had been in life. Lucas looked from the lushly alluring portrait to the unappetizing sight on the floor. He felt oddly like

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a drinking man who sees a bottle of fine brandy smashed.

"It was your Pole?"

Maigret shrugged his shoulders, still standing rooted in the middle of the room.

"Shall I give his description to our men so they can see that he doesn't leave the hotel?"

"If you wish."

"I'd like to put a man on the roof, just in case—"

"Go ahead."

"Shall I call the chief?"

"In a minute."

It was no easy job to talk with Maigret when he was like this. Lucas tried to put himself in his shoes. Maigret himself had said that he'd make a fool of himself. But this was worse than looking foolish. He had mobilized a large body of police when it was too late, when the crime had already been committed under Maigret's very eyes—almost with his consent, since he'd been the one who had sent Ozep into the Hotel Beausejour.

"And if any of the gang come back, shall I arrest them?"

An affirmative nod. Or rather a gesture of indifference. And at last Lucas went out.

"Where's Maigret?" the chief demanded of Lucas before he was halfway out of his car.

"In the room. Number nineteen on the second floor. The people in the hotel don't know about it yet."

A few minutes later the director of the Police Judiciaire found Maigret sitting in a chair in the middle of the room, two steps from the body.

"Well, my friend! It looks to me as though we were in a pretty fix!"

For answer he received a grunt.

"So the notorious killer was none other than the little man who offered you his services! You must admit, Maigret, you might have been somewhat less trustful; Ozep's attitude was, to say the least, suspicious . . . "

A heavy vertical furrow seamed Maigret's brow and his jaws jutted out, giving his whole face a striking quality of power.

"You think he hasn't managed to slip out of the hotel yet?"

"I'm sure of it," the inspector replied, as if he attached not the least importance to the matter.

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"You haven't searched the hotel?"

"Not yet."

"You think he'll let himself be captured easily?"

Then Maigret's gaze detached itself slowly from the window, shifted toward the director.

"If I'm wrong, the man will try to kill as many people as he can before he's arrested. If I'm not wrong, things will take care of themselves."

"I don't understand, Maigret."

"I tell you again, chief: I can be wrong. Anybody can be wrong. In that case, I beg your pardon, because there's going to be trouble. The way this case seems to have solved itself doesn't satisfy me. There's something that doesn't fit, I can feel it. If Ozep was Stan, there was no reason why . . . " His voice trailed.

"You're staying here, Maigret?"

"Pending further instructions, yes."

"Meanwhile, I'll go see what our men are doing outside."

They had arrested Spinach when, as Lucas had foreseen, he had come to pay his call on the young woman. When they told him that Olga had been killed, he turned pale, but he showed no reaction when they spoke of Ozep.

When this arrest was announced to Maigret, he merely mumbled, "What's it to me?" and resumed his strange tête-à-tête with the dead woman.

A half hour later it was One-Eye's turn to come home and be arrested on the threshold. He submitted impassively, but when they told him of the woman's death, he tried to break free from his handcuffs and leap upstairs.

"Who did it?" he shouted. "Who killed her? One of you, wasn't it?"

"It was Ozep, alias Stan the Killer."

The man quieted down as if by magic. He frowned as he repeated, "Ozep?"

"You aren't going to tell us you didn't know your boss's real name?"

It was the chief in person who conducted this hasty questioning in a corridor, and he had the impression that a faint smile crossed the prisoner's lips.

Then came another of the gang, the one they called The Chemist. He simply answered all questions with an air of absolute confusion, as if he had never heard of the woman or of Ozep or of Stan.

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Maigret was still upstairs, mulling over the same problem, hunting for the key that would at last enable him to understand what had happened.

"All right. . . ." he murmured when Lucas told him of the arrest of The Beard, who had begun by raging like a fiend and ended by bawling like a calf.

Suddenly he raised his head. "Do you notice something, Lucas? That's four that they've arrested, and not one of them's put up any real resistance. Whereas a man like Stan—"

"But since Stan is Ozep—"

"Have you found him?"

"Not yet. We had to let all the accomplices come home before we turned the hotel upside down. If they got a whiff of anything wrong, they'd never come into the mousetrap. Now that we have almost all of them, the big boss is laying siege to the establishment. Our men are downstairs and they're going to go through everything."

"Listen, Lucas . . ."

The sergeant had been about to leave. He paused, feeling for Maigret something akin to pity.

"One-Eye is not Stan. Spinach is not Stan. The Beard is not Stan. But I'm convinced that Stan lived in this hotel and was the focus around which the others gathered."

Lucas thought it better to say nothing. Let the inspector have his monomania.

"If Ozep was Stan, he had no reason to come here to kill an accomplice. If he was not Stan . . ."

Suddenly Maigret rose, crossed to the wall and pulled down the brightly colored picture of Olga. He tore away the tape that framed it, revealing lines of lettering above and below the face. He handed it to Lucas.

The sergeant knew enough English to make out both the line above:

Real Life Detective Cases

and the lines below:

The Pretty Pole and the
Terror of Terre Haute

Maigret was smiling now. "Vanity," he said. "They can't ever resist it. They had to buy the magazine when they saw it on the

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stands, and she had to frame the picture.

"I knew I'd seen her face before. I do remember the case roughly. I kept some clippings on it. Very similar to ours. In the Middle West of America, four or five years ago. A gang attacking lonely farms, cutting throats . . . just like ours . . . and they had a woman leader. The American press took great pleasure in describing her atrocities."

"Then Stan . . . ?"

" . . . was Olga. Almost certainly. I'll be positive in an hour, now that I know what to look for in the office. Are you coming with me, Lucas?"

"But Ozep?" Lucas asked as they settled back in the cab.

"It's Ozep I especially want to look up. That is, I'm hoping I'll find something about him. If he killed this woman, he must have had a motive . . . Listen, Lucas: When I wanted to send him to the others, he agreed at once. But when I gave him an errand to the woman, he refused, and I was forced to use pressure, even to threaten him. In other words, the rest of the gang did not know him—*but the woman did.*"

It took a half hour to find the clippings in question. Order was not Maigret's dominant attribute.

"Read this! Always allowing for the exaggeration of the American press—they like to give the readers their money's worth. 'The Female Fiend . . .' 'The Deadly Pole . . .' 'Girl, 23, Heads Murder Gang . . .'"

The press reveled in the exploits of the Polish girl and furnished many proofs of her photogenic qualities.

At eighteen Stephanie Polintskaja was already known to the Warsaw police. Around this time she met a man who married her and strove to curb her evil instincts. She had a child by him. One day the man came home from work to find that his wife had vanished with all the money and jewelry. The child's throat had been cut.

"You know who the man was?" Maigret asked.

"Ozep?"

"Here's his picture, and a good likeness. You understand now? Stephanie, nicknamed Stan, ran wild in America. How she escaped the American prisons I do not know. In any case she took refuge in France, surrounded herself with a fresh lot of brutes, and took up her old career.

"Her husband learns from the papers that she is in Paris, that

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the police are on her trail. Does he want to rescue her once more? I doubt it. I'm rather inclined to think that he wants to make sure that the destestable murderess of his child shall not escape punishment. That's why he offers me his services. He hasn't the guts to work alone. He's too much of a weakling. He needs the police to help him. And then, this afternoon, I force his hand . . .

"Face to face with his former wife, what can he do? Kill or be killed! She certainly would not hesitate to destroy the only man outside the gang who could testify against her.

"So he killed . . . And do you want to know what I think? I'm betting that they'll find him somewhere in the hotel, more or less seriously wounded. After muffing two attempts at suicide, it would amaze me if he muffed the third. Now you can go back to the hotel and—"

"No use!" It was the chief's voice. "Stan the Killer hanged himself in a vacant room on the sixth floor. Good riddance!"

"He made it," Maigret sighed. "Poor devil!"

"You're sorry for him?"

"Indeed I am. Especially since I'm somewhat responsible for his death . . . I don't know if it means I'm getting old, but I certainly took long enough to find the solution—"

"What solution?" the director asked suspiciously.

"The solution to the whole problem!" Lucas intervened happily. "The inspector has reconstructed the case in all its details."

"That so, Maigret?"

"It is . . . You know, if you keep mulling over the same question . . . I don't think I've ever been so mad at myself in my life. I felt that solution was there, within reach, that just one little touch . . . And you all kept buzzing around me like horseflies, telling me about arrests that didn't mean a thing . . . And then I remembered the American detective magazine and the woman's face on the cover . . . "

Maigret took a deep breath, loaded his pipe, and asked Lucas for matches. The afternoon vigil had used up all his own.

"What do you say, chief? It's seven o'clock. Suppose we three settle down to a nice glass of beer? Provided that Lucas gets rid of his wig and makes himself respectable again."

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BOOKED & PRINTED

by Mary Cannon



Illustration by Patricia Olstad

The days are getting lazy and long. The sun ascends ever higher in the sky, temperatures inexorably climb, and the roving eyes of restless mystery readers everywhere seek out—yes! The paperback racks. We want toteable terror; we need bad business that is beachbag size. It's definitely evil-under-the-sun time, and it's only those paperback editions of crime fiction that allow us to slake our thirst now.

I've noticed that many newcomers these days are getting their first shot into print as paperback-original authors. Now that the audience for mystery reading is growing, publishers are learning that they can sell even unknown authors at affordable paperback prices. The result is our great good fortune, offering readers not only reprints of successful hardcover novels but also some notable new perpetrators of crime fiction. Whether you're beginning to stockpile paperbacks for a Caribbean cruise, or merely in anticipation of countless idle hours in a back yard hammock, you should find something in this selection of paperback originals to suit your summertime fancy.

Carolyn G. Hart's newest, **A Little Class on Murder,** was first published in hardcover, though it soon became available in paperback (Bantam, $3.95). It's the fifth book in a delightful series, which stars Annie Laurence, a young mystery bookseller on the

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resort island of Broward's Rock (suspiciously reminiscent of Hilton Head). The first four novels that gave readers hot-headed Annie, her charming Max, and her store's mascot, the disdainful feline Agatha, were all published as paperback originals. The scanty review attention generally given to paperbacks didn't slow down the series, which won both an Agatha and an Anthony award last year. Hart's readers look to her for a classic puzzle (she's a big fan of Christie's and the play-fair mystery), a cosy milieu, entertaining characters, and a dollop of old fashioned romance. Begin your reading with the series opener, **Death on Demand** ($2.25); then move on to **Design for Murder** ($3.95); **Something Wicked**($3.95); **Honeymoon with Murder** ($3.95); and **A Little Class on Murder** ($3.95). They're all Bantam paperbacks, and they're all great getaway reading.

Writing in an entirely different tone is Keith Peterson, pseudonym for Andrew Klavan. Here's another series that was launched in paperback; two titles have been nominated for Edgars. Protagonist John Wells is an old-style, hard-hitting Manhattan crime reporter working in today's glitzy Murdoch-style world of newspapers. Peterson writes without gimmicks: there are no easily identifiable marks (cute pet, clever car, physical handicap, etc.). What we do get is real people, a skillful blend of action and reaction, an adult perspective on contemporary journalism, and a compelling literary style. The series opened with **The Trapdoor** ($2.25), then was followed by **There Fell a Shadow** ($3.50), **The Rain** ($3.50), and **Rough Justice** ($3.95).

Women sleuths are growing in popularity, and I'm seeing more new series featuring professional women private eyes. The heroine of author M. D. Lake's **Amends for Murder** (Avon, $3.50) is—and she isn't. She's a campus cop who comes to the job with a stint in the navy under her belt. She also brings a low-key approach to life, a droll sense of humor, and a nose for homicide (two out of three are definitely *not* called for in her job description). Peggy is a live-wire heroine who only has to discover one very dead don—then be warned off the case by the local cops—to begin her very own private investigation. Lake's midwest setting, down-to-earth narrator, and witty peek into academic politics make *Amends* an auspicious debut; Sue Grafton fans should love this one. (The sequel, *Cold Comfort,* is due out in time for winter. It too will be an Avon paperback original.)

Who could discuss paperback originals and overlook those delicious concoctions by Alisa Craig (aka Charlotte MacLeod)? Not I.

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Look for two series going under the Craig penname: the books starring everyone's favorite Royal Canadian Mountie (try **The Terrible Tide** and **Trouble in the Brasses**); and the delightful Grub-and-Stakers Club tales, with spinster Dittany Henbit at the head. Try **The Grub-and-Stakers Move a Mountain, The Grub-and-Stakers Pinch a Poke, The Grub-and-Stakers Quilt a Bee,** and **The Grub-and-Stakers Spin a Yarn.** All are Avon Books at $3.50 each, and all are perfect summertime fare, as frothy as cotton candy, as refreshing as a mint julep, as inviting as a parfait . . . get the picture? If your pocketbook won't let you get much farther than your porch swing this summer, these mysteries are flights of sheer fancy at prices way below commercial airlines'.

Another mystery with a small-town setting is Robert Nordan's **All Dressed Up to Die** (Bantam, $3.50). This one introduces Mavis Lashley just as she puts the finishing touches to her celebrated apple hot dish; she's taking it to the wake of an older neighbor. When she finds herself next making a condolence call on the reclusive women in the "big house" she quickly gets involved in a twenty-year-old mystery. Nordan has a real ear for the simple and the homespun, and he makes much of it here.

Author Lisa Bennett has two winners in a recent series starring a young, smart, and very sassy Manhattan art director. **Madison Avenue Murder** opens when Peg Goodenough loses her corporate mentor. *He* loses his life—in a most unpleasant fashion. And it's "fashion" that's the topic of the sequel, **Murder on Seventh Avenue,** when a very important client of Peg's ad agency is found hoisted on her own petard—or, in this case, hanged by her own designer pantyhose. Bennett has a quirky world view, a snappy sense of pace, and the ability to find humor in a tough situation without turning the entire thing into farce. There are numerous famous New York streets still untouched, and I hope she has a book planned for each and every one. Both of these are Worldwide editions at $3.50.

Lady Margaret Priam and friends run with an altogether different New York crowd. The creation of author Joyce Christmas, Lady Margaret is a high-born, well-bred, but genteelly poor Britishwoman. She is known in the best social circles, and she has oodles of influence. So when a very prominent socialite falls **Suddenly in Her Sorbet** ($3.50), Lady Margaret is enlisted by a rather attractive police detective. But it is the protesting young Prince Paul, the town's most eligible bachelor, whom she drafts as her Watson. Fawcett reprised this charming detecting duo in **Simply**

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to Die For ($3.95), the story of a young girl's debut and an old family's fear of scandal. Both are told with a light touch—ideal warm weather mystery choices. Both are Fawcett paperback originals, of course.

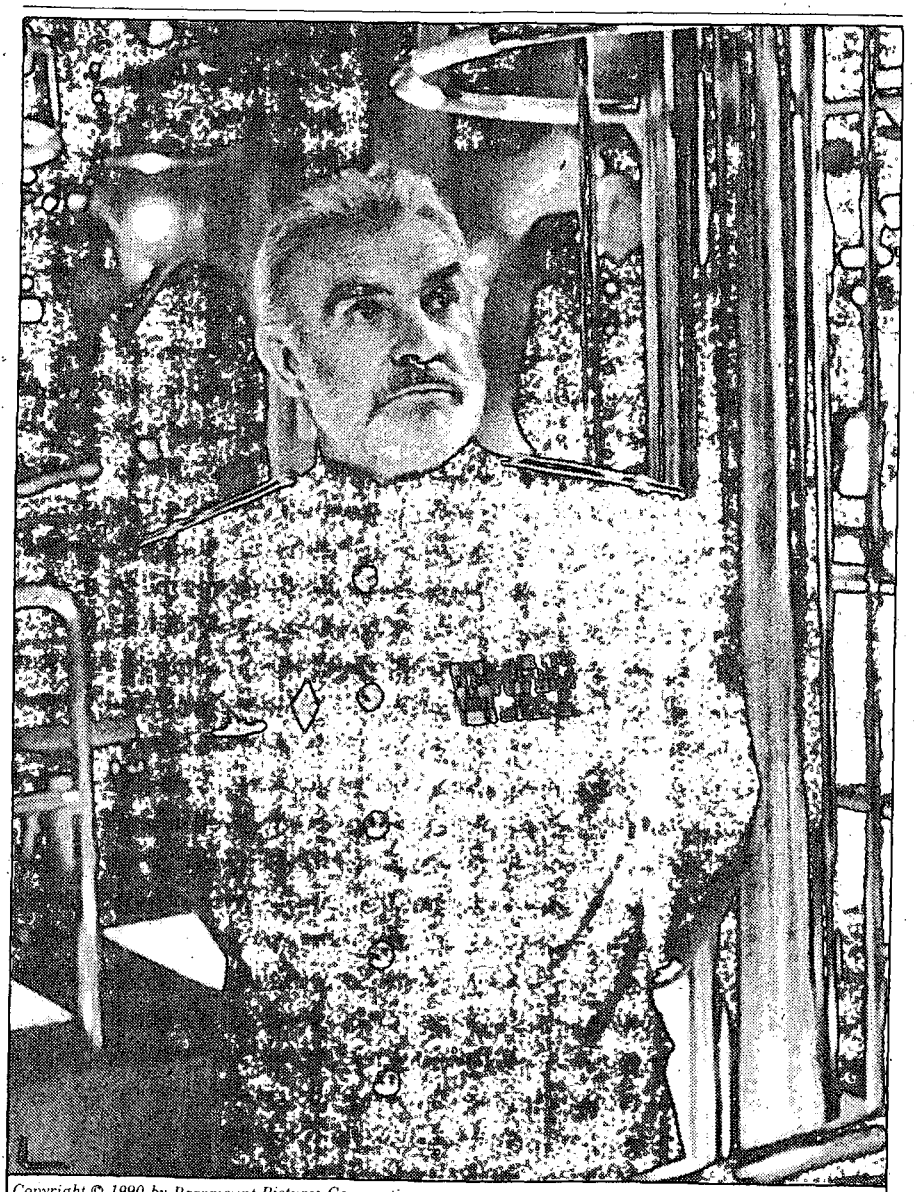
Final Option by Stephen Robinett introduces a thirtyish ace writer for a small but ambitious financial magazine called *Global Capitalism*. Looking for a roller-coaster pace, an ingratiating narrator, and a fresh background? Look no farther. Teeming with loads of financial stuff, computer stuff, and other good stuff, our man Jeeter's offbeat adventures make a brisk change of pace. The characters—especially a Wall Street *wunderkind*—are multi-dimensional and memorable while the plot has the intricacy of a caper novel. I could take Jeeter on vacation with me annually. (Avon, $3.50—and another wonderful paperback original.)

Rob Kantner is well-known to readers of AHMM for his frequent short stories in these pages. His series novels, starring the familiar Ben Perkins, have also been published as paperback originals. You probably all know that Perkins is a P.I., but did you know that his three novels currently available are **The Back-Door Man** ($2.25), **Dirty Work** ($2.25), and **Hell's Only Half Full** ($3.95)? All are Bantam books, and must-reads for his AHMM fans.

Trade paperbacks are usually the more expensive paperback mysteries; they're often larger than rack-size and frequently have been published by small press houses. Don't overlook them when you're seeking out new voices this summer. Ellen Hart's **Hallowed Murder,** for instance, introduces Minneapolis restaurateur Jane Lawless (Seal Press, $8.95). Jane is an appealing character, a self-possessed and compassionate woman, a lesbian still mourning the death of a lover, and very private in her personal life. But there's little privacy in the face of violent death, and it's the death of a University of Minnesota co-ed that pulls both Jane and her old chum Cordelia into the vortex of a very dangerous scenario. Before the exciting finale a number of secrets have come to light, as well as a killer.

Time now to get back to **Dead in the Scrub** by B. J. Oliphant (Fawcett, $3.95), which I'm reading at the moment. It premieres a series centered around a strong-hearted woman rancher in Colorado—a paperback original, of course. Next I'll turn to **Manhattan Is My Beat** by Jeffery Wilds Deaver (Bantam, $3.95), which was nominated for an Edgar this year . . . in the category of paperback original, naturally. Then . . . gosh, who has time to take a cruise anyway?

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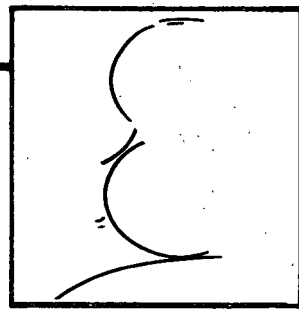
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Sean Connery in *The Hunt for Red October*

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MURDER BY DIRECTION

by William Heller



The Hunt for Red October is a Cold War thriller released in the McDonald's - comes-to-Moscow era. Try as it does to keep the tension alive, this film version of Tom Clancy's 1984 bestseller just misses the mark.

A whitehaired, weatherbeaten Sean Connery stars as Marko Ramius, the captain of a Soviet nuclear submarine. But this is not just any captain. And it's not just any sub. Ramius is the senior and most respected naval officer of his land. The sub under his command, the *Red October,* is the most deadly submarine ever built. Outfitted with the latest Soviet technology, this pride of the Soviet navy, it is said, can avoid detection by even sophisticated enemy sonar.

Ramius starts out by killing the Soviet political officer aboard his ship, destroys his orders to rendezvous with another Russian sub, and tells his men that they are leaving the Russian fleet to go behind American lines and engage in "a game of chess with our old adversaries."

Almost immediately, however, there is a chink in the supposed invincibility of the *Red October*. Much is made of the advanced hydropropulsion system—called a caterpillar drive—which makes this a stealth sub. But the U.S. Navy picks up the trail pretty quickly. All it takes is one relatively clever American sonar operator, and this guy (Courtney B. Vance) isn't even an officer.

Back at the Kremlin, they fear Ramius is defecting with their expensive new toy. In Washington, they're worried that the *Red October* has become a loose cannon. "Oh my

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god, they've got a madman on their hands," exclaims an American military bureaucrat when he's told of the problem.

The Hunt for Red October, boiled down, is a chase film. The Americans are in a hurry to catch and destroy the sub to prevent a possible attack. The Soviets are in a hurry to catch up with it before Ramius can give the *Red October* to the enemy.

Enter handsome CIA analyst Jack Ryan (Alec Baldwin), who offers a point of view contrary to that of U.S. Intelligence. Ryan, who looks the hero, is familiar with Ramius' background. He believes the captain wants to defect.

The clock begins to tick down. Young turk Ryan must prove he's right or the Americans will destroy the sub, which would prove an invaluable resource to American Intelligence. While he runs around the Atlantic Ocean on no sleep, the entire Soviet navy is also after *Red October.*

There are some tense moments during the chase, mostly involving Ryan's attempts to get in touch with Ramius and the Russian captain's attempts to keep his crew in the dark as to his real mission. But the film gets murky, literally, when it ventures into the ocean for underwater shots of the sub and its pursuers.

There is one scene, in which a Russian sub is firing torpedoes at the *Red October,* which looks like a second-class, underwater mimicking of Star Trek's *Enterprise* avoiding an attack from the Klingons. Scenes like that tend to deflate any tension which has been built up during the chase.

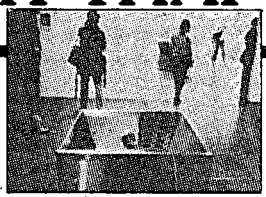
Although a line at the start of the movie tells us that the story takes place shortly before Mikhail Gorbachev came to power, the rapidly moving democratization of the Soviet bloc makes the story unbelievable in today's real world.

The movie *Fail-Safe* (1964) also attempted to capitalize on the nuclear-era Cold War, but succeeded as a tense drama because it was released during the height of that period. The danger shown there, it was feared, could happen any minute.

Today, with both superpowers cooperating on nuclear disarmament and with tension lessening, the story of a Marko Ramius is unlikely. This fact simply makes *The Hunt for Red October* less compelling than it might have been in another time.

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THE STORY THAT WON



The February Mysterious Photograph contest was won by Harriet Montana of Walnut Creek, California. Honorable mentions go to Jan Streilein of Johnstown, Pennsylvania; Kim Fawcett of Pierrefonds, Quebec, Canada; Albert Bashover of Delray Beach, Florida; Suzanne S. Wheal of Muncy, Pennsylvania; and Bob Wynn of Young's Point, Ontario, Canada.

© N. Jay Jaffee

WHO'S THE DUMMY? by Harriet Montana

Some guys love to go the race track; some think it's a piece of heaven to fish in a lake in the woods. I am a guy who is crazy about shopping.

A big sale thrills me like the Super Bowl thrills the rest of the country. Let the skiers have their winter snow and the joggers their blossoms in the spring. I can walk the aisles of a well-kept store and smell the seasons change in the merchandise.

About once a month I spend a night in one of my favorite big name stores and manage to take home a few valuables I'd never be able to buy. I analyze the security arrangements and keep up on the latest tricks in the trade. This time, as usual, I've hidden in a box in the attic and waited for the store to quiet down.

It's midnight. But now as I make my move to leave the box, I'm scared. By the street light outside I see six manikins standing around me. I counted five when I came in.

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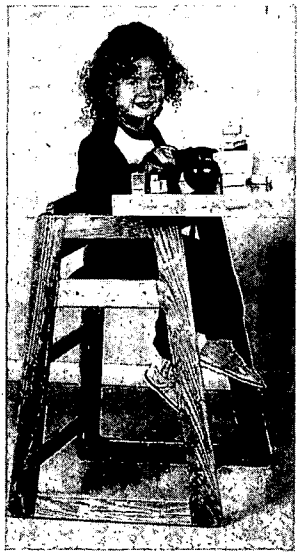
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MAIL ★ ORDER ★ MALL

▼ OUR EXCLUSIVE MAIL-ORDER INTRODUCTION



It's a toss-up as to whether it's kids or parents who are happiest with this very special Child's Chair. From the tyke's point of view, it's great because it pulls right up to a real table (fits under standard dining tables of 27¼" or higher). Children can feel part of family meals when not relegated to a highchair, plus a table is better than that little tray for food plus the requisite toys. Older toddlers are particularly pleased with what resembles a "grown-up" chair. Adults love the quality — American-made of solid ¾" oak, double-lacquered for protection, plus the safety features — all edges rounded, all screws recessed, polypropylene straps attached with screws and washers. Designed for durability (nylon gliders instead of casters that fall off; no upholstery to replace), it's been extensively tested in restaurants, where there's more abuse than even *your* kids can dish out. Since there's nothing like a highchair for spoiling your decor the very best feature may be the handsome styling. 18"x20" at base. **$85.98** ($10.00) #A1792.



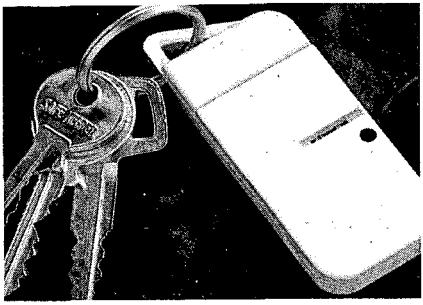
▼ YOUR FACE WILL THINK YOU'VE BEEN TO A LUXURY SPA

Some of the world's most famous professional salons rely on the deep-cleaning and rejuvenating effects of facial steaming. Accomplishing it at home has meant leaning over a stove under a towel tent — and who can be bothered? Now, there's the Episauna — just fill with tap water, plug in, flip up the hood to a comfortable angle and enjoy the warm, soothing mist. Tense facial muscles relax, nature's own perspiration system is stimulated to open and clean pores; built-up cosmetics and grime disappear. Use with your favorite cream and see its effects multiplied — dry, even over-sunned or chapped skin — can benefit. With hood flipped down, Episauna is just 3½" tall, for easy storing or packing. Even adjusts for foreign voltages automatically. U.L. listed, doubles as a vaporizer/inhaler for nasal congestion. **$39.98** ($4.00) #A1862.



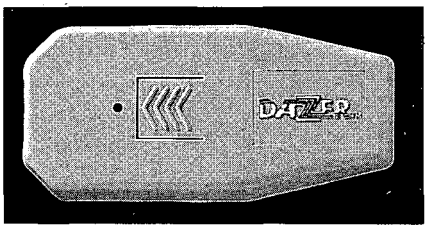
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▼ EASY KEY FINDER



Keys are misplaced more often than any other modern essential. Now thanks to our easy key finder your keys can tell you where you put them. Clap your hands 4 times and it will chirp electronically. Works up to 30' away. Special hybrid microchip design requires no on/off switch (other units need you to turn them ON before you lose your keys). This unit has a high-impact plastic case; weighs a mere ½oz; comes with its own key ring; measures only 2½"x1⅛"x⅜". Batteries and a 30-day manufacturer's warranty are included. **$13.98** ($3.00) #A1889; two units, **$23.98** ($4.00) #A1890.

▼ HELPFUL TO HUMANS HARMLESS TO DOGS



Even the most dedicated canine afficionado can sometimes encounter unfriendly dogs. Dazer™ provides a humane way to repel their advance, emitting ultrasonic sound waves inaudible to humans and totally safe for dogs (unlike mace and other common deterrents). Pocket size (4¾" long) plastic case can also clip on belt; takes 1-9V battery, included. For joggers, hikers, bikers, seniors and kids—plus the proverbial postman. **$29.98**, ($3.00) #A1829X.

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Do we exaggerate? Actually, it may take *less* than half the time you'd normally spend assembling, toting and juggling bottles or buckets, rags, a hose, a stepstool. Spray & Wipe™ combines in one implement an ample reservoir for your cleaning fluid, a spray trigger at the base and adjustable mist-to-spray head at top, plus a squeegee. At 34" long, it eliminates much climbing; is lightweight but sturdy for firm leverage on the squeegee; swivel head reaches angles. Think patio doors, shower stalls, boats, campers, windshields, et al. **$15.98** ($4.00) #A1865X.

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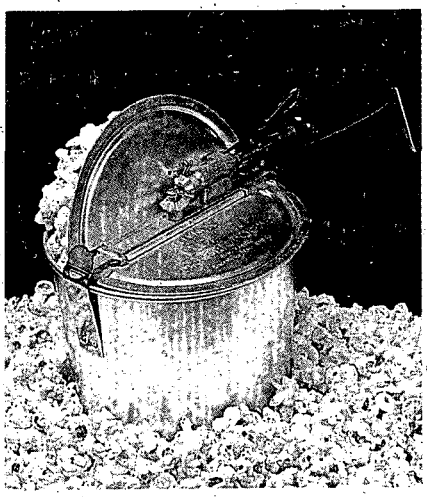
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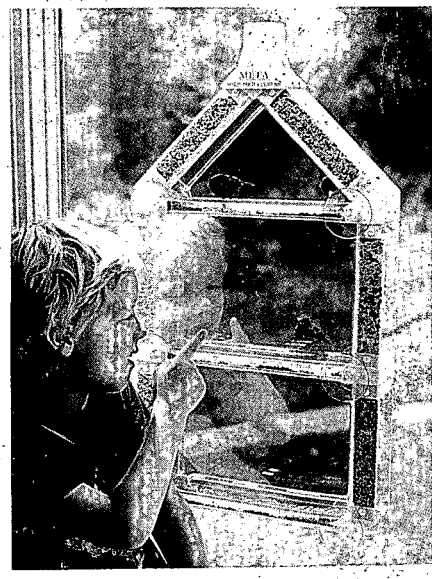
▽ GOURMET POPCORN POPPER



All new high temperature 6 qt. popcorn popper. Most electric and hot-air poppers "puff" the corn more than they "pop" it, leaving it tough with hard centers. This flat-bottomed stove-top popper reaches 475° and pops full in two minutes with 6 quarts of the best popcorn you ever tasted. Stirring paddle with through-the-crank handle virtually eliminates burnt or unpopped kernels. Wooden handle for safe grip, two dump lids. Pop without oil for delicious diet popcorn. 370 calories per 4 qt. bowl. Produce tender, fluffy, old fashioned movie theater popcorn with the Detonator™ popper. Made in the USA. **$24.98** ($5.00) #A1950.

▽ FOR THE BIRDS

A super feeding system that really is "for the birds". The Meta Wild Bird Feeder™ has a unique tri-level perch design that encourages different species to feed together. It is easy to fill and provides a total of 30 inches of feeding space and holds 2½ quarts of seed in six individual feeding stations, so different seed mixes can be used to attract different species of birds. The feeder features 2-way optical quality mirror panels that lets you watch from just inches away, while the birds feed undisturbed. Constructed of durable and attractive Lexan®, the feeder is easy to clean, even in the dishwasher. The Meta Feeder™ measures 26"x14"x5", comes fully assembled and mounts easily to any window. Plus, it comes with a lifetime warranty. So, get in on the biggest hobby in the U.S. and "feed the birds". **$79.98** ($10.00) #A1946.



TO ORDER: Send check with item number for total amounts, plus shipping & handling shown in () payable to **MAIL ORDER MALL**, Dept. 070 HK, P.O. Box 3006, Lakewood, N.J. 08701, or call TOLL FREE **1-800-365-8493**. N.J. residents add 6% sales tax. We honor MasterCard/Visa. Sorry, no Canadian, foreign, C.O.D. orders. Satisfaction Guaranteed. 30 day money back guarantee for exchange or refund. Allow 30 days for delivery.

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